Some Minds

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Characters:
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by magnuspr1m3

Summary

Sideswipe initially came to them alone. Not peacefully, of course; no, he took out half a patrol single-handedly before Ironhide held his cannon to his helm and demanded his cooperation. The bright red youngling had turned and spat at Ironhide, “Shoot me.” He had actually brought a hand up, gripped the side of the cannon and held it directly to his helm. “Shoot me! Do it!”
Ironhide would not, and Ratchet was more than grateful for this later.

Notes

So, this is currently 30,000 words, and not done. There is a lot more to come, as it ultimately leads up to Sideswipe's appearance in the Bay-verse movies. Be patient with me, though, as I am in my last semester of undergrad, so senior design may limit my posting schedule. All of this is unbeta'd as well, so just hit me up if you see a glaring grammar mistake that I glossed over in my own editing process.

Chapter 1

Sideswipe initially came to them alone. Not peacefully, of course; no, he took out half a patrol single-handedly before Ironhide held his cannon to his helm and demanded his cooperation. The bright red youngling had turned and spat at Ironhide, “Shoot me.” He had actually brought a hand up, gripped the side of the cannon and held it directly to his helm. “Shoot me! Do it!”

Ironhide would not, and Ratchet was more than grateful for this later. Instead, the weapon’s specialist brought a fist up and knocked the youngling out with a quick strike to his helm and hauled him back to base. Prowl insisted on throwing him in the brig, especially after he took out half of a patrol of highly skilled warriors. The same mech that dragged him back to their base that was most against the idea.

“He wanted to die.” Ironhide said, voice oddly soft. It had startled all of the officers enough to snap all of their optics to him. Ironhide had always been a gruff mech, only showing this level of softness with his mate, Chromia. And she had been lost to them for many vorns by that time. “He wanted to die. S’why he attacked us, probably. Mechling needs to be watched, not left alone. Strap him to a berth in the medbay, if ya want him restrained, but if you throw him in the brig, and a youngling dies, yer gonna be the one I shoot through the helm, Prowl.” The stern look in those cobalt blue optics left no room for argument.

Which was how Ratchet found himself, several joors later, with a bright red youngling in his medbay glaring at him. He had introduced himself, explained where the mechling was, and asked for his designation. Not a peep, unless you counted the growl of the other’s engine. The medic rolled his optics, shrugging. “Suit yourself. I’ll bring you energon in a few joors.” He had dealt with difficult mechlings before. Leave the poor thing alone for a bit, and he would talk. They always did. He took two steps from the berth before their newcomer spoke. *That was quick*, Ratchet thought to himself, forcing down a smirk.

“Don’t bother,” was the sharp response, and Ratchet raised an optic ridge. “Just kill me. Why are you keeping me alive? I don’t know anything. Just kill me! Just kill me!” Arms tugged at bindings desperately, looking to them in confusion at first and then…

An odd sort of relief. Like the bindings were familiar to the youngling.

He looked at them like one might look at a favorite younglinghood blanket. He fell oddly silent, but his shouting still echoed in the medic's spark, the absolutely desperate tone coming from the young mech. It was not taunting. That was honest to Primus begging for death. Ratchet wanted to know why, wanted to fix what caused such a young mech to cry and scream for death. He wanted to not see a youngling *happy* to be restrained, like the restraints were home.

Ratchet hummed softly to get the youngling's attention, fearing anything louder may have startled him from where he just watched how the bindings stretch when he tugged. Crimson optics shifted up to Ratchet again, noticeably less aggressive and anxious than before. "What's your designation, kid?"

The youngling responded instantly this time, much to Ratchet's surprise. Without the least bit of hesitation, he said, "I'm Sideswipe. My twin's name is Sunstreaker, but I call him Sunny. They- they have him still." It was a lot of information for Ratchet to process at first. He had a designation, and some very important sparkhealth information as well. *They* implied that Sideswipe had been a captive before, as his twin still was then. He made quick note of everything in Sideswipe's file while he changed the name, before turning back to him.

"Where is your brother, Sideswipe?" If they were actual twins, splitspark twins, then Sideswipe would likely be able to locate his twin easily enough. He had heard other splitsparks describe it as a sort of constant pull on your spark when away from one another. The strength of that pull depended on the strength of the bond between the twins. In some cases, stronger bonds drove the mechs crazy the further and longer apart they were. He would put a lot of money on Sideswipe and his brother being very close with how desperate he seemed at times.

Red shoulders shrugged, "Unless Shockwave has moved bases again, probably still back there. I could track him, if I wanted to, but he doesn't want me to come back. He says, 'stay with the medic, they'll just kill you here', which is dumb, because if they kill me, they kill him, and Shockwave already went through all the trouble of *trying* to merge us, so I mean." Sideswipe cut himself off with another shrug, bright red optics falling down to his lap. As Ratchet worked through all of this new information, his fingers played at the bindings some. A little frown graced the younglings features, followed by a wince. "They're doing it again." He whispered.

That caught Ratchet's attention. "Doing what?" What could Sideswipe

be talking about? Was his twin telling him what was going on, what they were putting him through? Better yet, was 'if they kill me, they kill him' why Sideswipe had tried to get himself killed? To free his twin, albeit through death?

"Torturing him," His voice trembled, frame doing the same. He looked pained, as if he were feeling residual bits of the torment through their bond. Not completely unheard of, but not common – even with splitsparks – either. "They want him to find me, but he won't. Stupid."

Ratchet shook his helm, scowling at the youngling. "That's not stupid. He is your twin, and obviously cares for you a lot. Would you help them find him, if your places were switched?"

Sideswipe's face contorted in rage at the question, shaking his own helm quickly in denial. "Of course not! But he won't let me come back. If I try to, he shuts me out. Not completely, but enough that I have trouble finding him."

"Do you want to go back?"

The questions startled Sideswipe, who actually jumped a bit. Did he? For Sunstreaker, yes. But he did not want to be back there. Not anymore. He wanted to experience something other than Shockwave's craziness in his life, even if it wound up being short because of the war going on all around them. He wanted to feel something other than fear or rage. He wanted to be *happy*. For Sunny, though, he would give up whatever happiness he could have had.

"No, but-" He began, ready to explain this to the medic. Ratchet did not understand what it felt like, to be as closely connected to another mech as he and Sunny were. But, confessing that truth would let the medic know what abominations Shockwave had been trying to make them into. Something twisted and very *not* them.

Ratchet stopped him, holding a hand up. "No buts. If you don't want to go back, you don't have to. Optimus will send a squad to rescue your brother."

Sideswipe's optics went comically wide at that, shuttering a few times in surprise. "T-the *Prime*?" His surprise was amusing, but Ratchet had to wonder how he had not put together exactly where he was. Ironhide, the mech who brought him in, was the Autobots' weapons specialist, and had been captain of the previous Prime's guard for vorns; he was a well-known mech. How long had Shockwave had a hold of them, that they did not know who the main officers of the

Autobots were?

“I mean, I am the chief medical officer of the Autobots. I have a little bit of pull, kid.” He kept his tone light and teasing, watching Sideswipe for some sort of reaction. The kid was very responsive, and funny. He was just so *alive*. Ratchet sent up a few prayers to Primus, to thank him for bringing this lively little thing to his medbay, and made a note to remind himself to get Ironhide some high grade later, when Sideswipe just continued to gape at him. The medic snorted and tapped his chin up with a single digit. “Shut your mouth kid, unless you wanna catch turboflies.”

Sides just continued to stare in wonder, mouth now shut. Ratchet stared right back, hands on his hips struts and a smirk on his face. He could wait, especially now that the kid was finally cooperating some. He did not wait long before the youngling whispered, “B-but he always said you guys were evil. That the Prime was the worst of all the Autobots.”

He could not keep himself from snorting again, “So you went looking for one of our patrols?”

“I wanted to die.” A little shrug had Ratchet’s spark plummeting at that reminder. He knew very well that while Sideswipe was calm now, the longer he was away from his twin, the worse it would be. Sideswipe could very well mean those words soon, as madness settled in. They needed to act fast.

If not for needing Sideswipe to locate his twin, Ratchet would have had the bright red youngling strapped to a berth. How the mechling could move, let alone have made it all the way to Iacon from Shockwave’s hideout, without having his twin by his side after what they had gone through… Ratchet was amazed. Not only was there severe damage to his spark, but he was also constantly feeling his twin’s pain at whatever Shockwave was doing. And Ratchet had read Jazz’s recon reports on some of Shockwave’s experiments.

Those poor mechlings.

Sideswipe had said that they were meant to be the perfect killing machines; *Shockwave* had been their carrier, but they did not know who their sire was. A skilled fighter, they knew that much. Those who watched or trained them said they were just as ruthless as he was. Those who faced them in the Rings quaked in fear, knowing just whose progeny they were facing. And they never lost. Their caretakers

and Shockwave praised them each time for their ability to kill so easily. Not necessarily what a youngling should be told, but the twins started to thrive on it. That was better than the beatings or the torment their own carrier put them through if they hesitated.

It got worse when they hit thirty vorns old. They both startled awake one night to a sharp pain in their sparks, sending them both into high alert. *Shockwave*. Their bond to him had been broken. They thought he had died, and at such a young age, had immediately gotten up and rushed to find him. To make sure their carrier was all right; even if he never treated them particularly well, he was all they really knew. They charged through his base to find him, even with the nearly debilitating pain in their sparks from the severed carrier bond. Any mech or drone that tried to stop them was taken out, nothing standing between them and Shockwave.

“You’re early,” He had said when they found him prepping two berths in his lab. They were for surgery, if all of the tools laid out were anything to go by.

They shrank together, so close that were their paint wet, it would have mixed into a vibrant orange. Dread, anger, and sadness swarmed through and around them, overloading their processors as well as their sparks for a moment. Shockwave had severed their bond himself? He had to have, if he were just in his lab casually preparing for some sort of experiment. And they feared why he would have done such a thing, even if he did seem to hate them most of the time.

Turned out Shockwave was worried about how splicing their two sparks together would go properly if they had any other bonds at the time of surgery. He wanted to make them into a gestalt, which was no easy feat. Definitely not something done with splitsparks before.

“He failed, for the most part,” Sideswipe had whispered softly, Ratchet and the other officers gathered around him. The red mechling had not allowed anyone to get closer than several paces away aside from Ratchet, who practically hovered over the youngling. He would insist it was because the mech was obviously in bad shape. His friends knew better, but would not mention it at the time. They were all too enraptured with the horrifying tale of Sideswipe’s escape, and why he had tried to get himself killed.

“Sunny… it was hardest on him. Something- I dunno, something went wrong, something shorted out…” Sides shrugged, looking so lost. “He’s always angry now. Always. I feel it, always there… Just below

the surface, y'know? He tries to block it out, but we can't really. I feel *everything*, just like he does. Emotions, pain… *everything.*

"We were both supposed to get out, or die trying. That was the plan, but Sunny got caught. They're hurting him." They barely heard him whisper it, except Ratchet, who was so close to the mech, looking ready to reach out and hold him close. If not for the monitors, he might have. "I-If I die, Sunny does, too. And then they'll stop hurting him to try and get me back. B-but Shockwave wants us both, so he won't kill Sunny. He put too much time into us. S-s-so I-I have to *kill* myself, but I can't! I can't I just-"

Sides choked some, frame trembling and Ratchet had given in then. He wrapped an arm around the youngling's shoulders, squeezing gently and wrapping the other's field in his own to try and soothe him some. "I don't want to die." Sides managed, and if Ratchet squeezed a little too hard then, he said nothing.

Optimus had called in the Wreckers and Ultra Magnus to storm Shockwave's base and get Sunstreaker out. That had completely thrown everyone except Jazz for a loop, the saboteur just smirking at his oldest friend instead. It had sent the red mechling into tears, and Ratchet had nearly throttled the Prime until he realized that they were not actually sad tears. Sideswipe had insisted on joining them, much to Ratchet's chagrin, citing the fact that he was the only one that could actually track them and knew the layout of Shockwave's base like the back of his hand since he had grown up there. He knew better than to keep twins apart. He just resigned himself to staying on Sideswipe's aft the entire time.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

> I had intended to wait a bit before posting this chapter, but honestly did not expect the response I got to this story. So, since y'all are so great, here is chapter 2 of... a lot lol

Keeping on top of Sideswipe proved to be more difficult than Ratchet initially expected. The youngling was quick and nimble, weaving in and out of battle as if it were nothing. Ratchet had *never* been quick or nimble; his frame was not meant for speed or grace. He kept shouting after the youngling to slow down, or not go too far ahead. For some odd reason, he listened. It was not safe for Sideswipe to slip off on his own, even if he was a capable fighter. If Shockwave really wanted them both back, the last thing they needed to do was let the youngling go off alone to get his twin. That was just a disaster waiting to happen.

Jazz caught on to Ratchet's desperate struggle to keep an optic on the youngling, and wormed his way through the battle to get closer to them. "I got the kid, Ratch." He assured the medic, nodding to where Sideswipe was practically vibrate behind cover. Jazz knew that look, had seen it in some of the more battle hungry mechs amongst them. That kid was itching to fight, battle protocols running at maximum capacity. Keeping him out of battle, although optimal given his age, was not going to do them any good if he eventually snapped. "I'll watch him. You just stick as close as you can." Ratchet looked extremely uncomfortable with the idea of just letting the young mech at it, but Jazz gave him a quick pat before he could say anything and turned to Sideswipe.

"Lead the way, kiddo!" That got him a brief surprised flicker of red optics, before Sideswipe was off. The youngling was definitely fast, but Jazz kept up with ease, fighting with and around the kid with surprising ease.

Sideswipe fought just like they had in the Rings, from what Jazz had seen when casing the Rings back before the war. He suppressed a frown at what sort of life that had to have been, not only being *Shockwave's* offspring, but also having to grow up in the Rings on top of that torment. Yet, the kid seemed relatively cheery and easy going when they had all been headed to the compound. In fact, Ratchet had struggled to get the youngling to shut up for a few moments. How

could such a happy youngling come from such terrible beginnings?

Probably the same way an archivist became Prime and a senator became a slagging good medic.

“He’s close!” Sideswipe had called to Jazz, barely a klik before just breaking away from the ‘Cons and Bots and sprinting away. The saboteur groaned loudly, downing the larger mech he was currently struggling against with a simple slice of his blade to some delicate cabling and a quick plasma blast in his abdomen. Maybe keeping up with Sides would not be as easy as he expected if the mechling pulled any more stunts like that.

Jazz rushed after him, sliding around a corner and nearly hitting a wall in his attempts to catch up. “Sides, ya killin’ me here, younglin’!” He called after him, catching a speck of red in the distance. Sideswipe just rushing ahead, not stopping to realize that there were no mechs guarding this corridor like the rest.

It was a trap.

Jazz was yelling over comms for help as soon as possible, anyone, charging after Sideswipe with renewed purpose. He had no time to listen to response or talk much, just bursting out his location and drawing his plasma pistol. He would have preferred going in with stealth, but there was no time to pull up one of his profiles to sneak in. There were younglings’ lives at stake. He just hoped beyond hope that Prowl would have no reason to scold him after all of this.

No time for distracting thoughts, Jazz. He scolded himself, pushing himself to move quicker to get to Sideswipe’s side. Ratchet would have his skidplate if the little berserker got hurt. Plasma pistol charged and ready, he slipped into the only room on the hall. He practically ran over Sideswipe, who stood there quivering just in the entrance. Just beyond the way stood Shockwave, field emitting smugness for all those around to feel as he held a bright yellow youngling by one arm, dangling him high off the ground. That had to be Sideswipe’s twin, given their strikingly similar appearances.

“What are you doing here, you dumbaft?!” That threw Jazz for a loop. The yellow youngling just yelled at his twin, flailing somewhat against Shockwave a bit. He sounded legitimately angry at Sideswipe, who just stood there shaking. “I told you to stay away! Why would you come back? *Do you want to die?*”

Jazz barely heard the soft no that came out of Sideswipe, deciding

that enough was enough. He whipped his pistol up, firing a quick two shots directly at Shockwave's shoulder joint. The crazy mech howled in pain, dropping the youngling. Before Jazz could even think to yell for the twins to run, the yellow one was rushing forward and leaping at him. He tumbled backwards, back colliding loudly with the ground just outside the doorway with a small youngling holding a blade to his throat and snarling. He was like a feral mech, similar to some of the tribes he had encounter ages ago.

A flash of red and suddenly the twins were tumbling across the hall, the yellow one snarling and Sideswipe trying to subdue him. There was no time for any of that, though, not with Shockwave *right there*. Jazz snatched a twin in each hand and ran for the sounds of fighting further down the hall. The yellow one struggled, but much weaker than initially. After another quick glance, Jazz could spot why. The poor mechling looked malnourished, and was bleeding energon from several places. "Gotta get you to Ratchet, li'l buddy." Jazz said, holding the twins close to his torso as he ducked a shot from behind. "And away from ol' one-optic, too. Primus, that mech's obsessive."

"Thank you," Sideswipe whispered, pressing close. Jazz could still feel an occasional shiver from the red mechling, which was concerning. He would have to let Ratchet know about that, so the mech could get Smokescreen to talk to Sides. He would hate for the little mech to wind up having any serious processor problems later in life, but knew it was bound to happen anyway. The sooner they taught both of them healthy coping mechanisms, the better. Jazz just gave him a quick grin and a nod before returning to trying to locate the medic.

Thankfully, Ratchet found him. Jazz nearly shot the mech when suddenly someone was just taking the twins from him. A quick whack to his helm had him blinking in confusion before just nodding to the medic and moving back to the fight. Ratchet had the twins now. Jazz was sure no harm could come to them with Ratchet hovering over them constantly now.

"You must be Sideswipe's twin. Pleasure to meet you." Ratchet said to the yellow twin after giving Sides a quick once over. He had no serious injuries that couldn't be treated back at base. "Sunstreaker, right?" He was a completely different story. The poor thing needed an energon drip, and was likely in a lot of pain with one arm out of the socket. He could not do much for that, nor did he want to in the middle of a battlefield. He could patch him up, though.

Sunstreaker nearly sliced his hand off with a blade when he reached

towards him again, snarling loudly. “Don’t touch me!” His tone of voice gave him away, though. He was *scared*, and Ratchet could honestly not blame him. Here was this strange mech, amongst a bunch of other strange mechs, taking him from the only place he had known as home in the middle of a firefight, all while he was injured. Ratchet would probably lash out to. Sideswipe was at his twin’s side in a moment, wrapping him tightly in his arms and successfully pinning the blade to Sunstreaker’s side in the process. *Clever mechling,* Ratchet thought with a proud grin.

Ratchet held both of his hands up, one empty and the other holding his patch materials. “I just want to patch those wounds up, kid. I won’t hurt you, I promise. You can ask your brother. I’m completely harmless.”

Sunstreaker continued to eye Ratchet. Sideswipe eventually let him go, likely having discussed what was going on with the other through their bond. The mechling took a cautious step towards him again. “You hit that other mech on his helm, though.”

Ratchet’s sudden laughter startled both mechlings, clinging together in an instant. “He deserved it. I won’t hurt either of you, though. Ever. I promise.” And it was startling to realize just how much Ratchet meant that. He would rather face down Unicron by himself than hurt either of the two trembling youngling before him. He was in far too deep already, just like every time before. He could hear his sparkmate laughing at him now, scolding him for picking up more strays. He would of course remind the other that he had once also been one of Ratchet’s strays.

Seemed the yellow one of his newest two was finally warming up to him, at least enough to come towards him and let him start patching him up. He was extremely careful around his arm, not wanting to hurt the mechling any more than necessary; he would set that later when the other was in a nice, drug-induced sleep. Sunstreaker stood perfectly still the entire time, while Sideswipe continued to quiver at his side. It was curious, watching the two. Sideswipe had joked that they were opposites, but Ratchet had never thought that it was quite like this. Still, he doubted the were as different as Sideswipe thought.

“All done! Well, sorta. As done as I can get you here.” Ratchet said, giving Sunstreaker a quick pat on the helm. The mechling actually glared up at him because of it, which Ratchet would definitely be getting the image of framed later. It was definitely more adorable than the youngling intended it to be.

And the next second, the twins were rushing off together. Not very far, thankfully. However, Ratchet would really have preferred they not go *back* out into the fighting. Of course, why would they listen as he yelled after them? He was only looking after them, after all. Only trying to keep them alive. What did he know?

He knew shortly after that that the twins fought around each other with deadly grace. They should have barely been walking, let alone taking on mechs three times their size, yet they did so ruthlessly. Both were dripping with energon, although Ratchet felt sure it was not their own, not after he had just patched them up. If one took a hit, the other was instantly there to defend them. Not that they got hit often. Their small size was definitely an advantage, as well as how quick they were. Watching them fight was still anxiety inducing for the medic, though. Even if they were obviously capable, Ratchet still very much wanted to snatch them up and run. He wanted them as far away from there as possible, especially with how much damage Sunstreaker had taken from his time alone with Shockwave. If they were not already too big to go into his spark vault, he definitely would have forced them both into it and just gotten as far from this place as possible. The others could take the base out. He had two younglings to worry about.

Two very, very deadly younglings, but younglings all the same.

“Sideswipe! Sunstreaker! Stick close to me!” He shouted, catching the yellow mechling’s attention first. He turned and practically sneered at Ratchet, opening his mouth to say something before slamming it shut to whip around and glare at his twin. Sides ran up and snagged Sunstreaker by his good arm, pulling him back towards Ratchet. Ratchet heard Sunny snap at his twin, obviously displeased but Sides did not seem to care.

Ratchet sent a quick comm to Prime before gently picking them both up and ignoring Sunny’s snarling. “We are done here. I’m taking you back to the ship so we can head back to base.”

That stopped Sunny’s snarling really quickly. “The *Autobot base*?”

Ratchet should have expected that with how Sideswipe had reacted before to learning who he was. He smirked at the mechlings as he made it to their ship, walking back on and setting them all in back on the ships makeshift medbay. “Well, one of them, anyway. Welcome to the Autobots, Sunstreaker.”

. . .

Prowl had been waiting for them when they returned, two brightly colored sparklings twittering eagerly in his arms. They had wings, much to Sideswipe and Sunstreaker's surprise. They had not thought there were any fliers amongst the Autobots. And, being so close in size… they had to be twins as well. They had never seen other twins, let alone other sparklings or younglings. The closest they had ever come were Soundwave's cassettes. Most sparklings did not live to younglinghood with the Decepticons, let alone to their first vorn. They just gaped at the two tiny fliers, watching as the silver mech – Jazz – moved forward and snatched them up, cooing at them as they chirped happily back at him.

… Was that how creators were supposed to act with their children? The twins shared a look, part of them each mourning the affection they were never shown. Neither could imagine it, though; Shockwave was far from a gentle mech. Was it sad, that they could not even imagine their carrier cradling them close like Jazz did those flier twins? Probably, but they were not allowed to dwell on it much longer before Ratchet was talking to them, snapping their attention back to the medic. Two sets of red optics just stared up at him as he spoke softly, something about medbays and fuel and berths and-

Sunstreaker collapsed first, Sideswipe instinctively catching him without a second thought. Ratchet seemed startled by that, but Sideswipe was not. He could feel his twin's exhaustion, matching his own. Sunny just needed some rest, and a lot of repairs. As Sides sat down with his twin in his lap, swaying some himself, and Ratchet appeared to already be scanning them both and rattling stuff off to other mechs, he realized that they would both be all right. Casting his gaze to Ratchet, who was most definitely saying something his overly tired processor refused to listen to, he saw genuine concern there. Something that had never once been intended for the twins before their daring escape.

Ratchet would keep them safe. They would be okay. Sideswipe lay down slowly, letting that thought ease him into recharge as Ratchet huffed above him, rolling his optics. They would be okay.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

> Thanks everyone for the kudos and comments so far! I'll try to update again sometime in the next two weeks.

“Hey, Ratch,” Jazz called, rushing up to Ratchet after the medic and First Aid had each picked up a twin to carry back to the medbay. Ratchet looked over his shoulder, initially frowning but immediately smiling instead when he spotted Jetfire and Jetstorm still in Jazz’s hold. (Jazz was totally not using his own sparklings as protection from the wrench-crazed medic, not at all.)

With a tiny wave at the two happily chirping sparklings, Ratchet turned his attention back to Jazz. “Thank you for keeping an eye on Sideswipe and his brother earlier. I fear I may not have been quick enough to get them both to safety.” His tone was rather somber, and Jazz knew all too well what was likely going through Ratchet’s processor; he thought he was not good enough. Damn mech and self-esteem issues.

“I dunno, mech, you’re pr’scrappy when ya need to be.” Jazz reminded him, shifting the twins in his hold some as he thought about how best to mention what he needed to without possibly worrying the medic more. He barely knew these new younglings, but was already hovering about them as if they were his own. He had barely let Sunstreaker and Sideswipe get more than an arm’s length away from him, and he had been even more selective with who could get close to the younglings. Optimus had walked up to ask how they both were and Ratchet’s engine had actually growled. It was actually hilarious. “Just wanted to give you a quick bit o’ info. Saw something ya might wanna talk to Smokey about.”

That got the medic’s attention, field suddenly snapping tightly to his frame. “What?” His voice was tight, and Jazz could tell he knew what he wanted to talk about: Shockwave.

Jazz braced himself for Ratchet possibly getting angry or defensive, nodding to Sideswipe. “When we ran into Shockwave, he froze. Completely. He just stood there an’ shook.” It still broke Jazz’s spark to think about how Sideswipe had so easily torn through mechs much larger than him, only to start acting like an actual youngling at the sight of one mech. A mech that was supposed to be his carrier, at no

less. Jazz wanted to murder the mech, and held his own sparklings a little closer. “Sunstreaker was just yelling and flailing about. Sides wouldn’t move or say a word. Ya should get him talkin’ to Smokey. Probably Sunshine over there, too, whenever he is recovered.”

He was pleasantly surprised to not be on the receiving end of Ratchet's rage at the implication that there was something he medically could not handle. Instead, he got a resigned sigh from the medic. “I anticipated needing to do so, unfortunately. Poor mechlings.” He muttered, nodding to Jazz. “I plan to let Sideswipe and Sunstreaker adjust to being on base with us first, however. This is already a lot of change for the both of them. Don't need Smokescreen poking around in their helms on top of that.”

Jazz shifted the twins so he held them both in one arm and held a hand up in defense, “Hey, whatever ya wanna do mech. I was just lettin' ya know what I saw.” He pressed the two small frames closer to his chest, get two happy whirs in response that had the grumpy old medic smiling softly. Ratchet always had a soft spot for sparklings.

“Thank you again, Jazz.” Ratchet said, voice soft as he started to move once more towards the medbay. “Go spend some time with your family. I’m sure those little ones want to here all about your latest ‘adventure’.” There was a teasing lilt to the mech’s voice as he nodded one last good bye. He had two mechlings of his own – in a metaphorical sense, at least – to take care of. At least until they were in shape enough to be placed with a proper caretaker. Then they would be off Primus knows where, likely causing trouble for some other poor mech instead.

Part of Ratchet hoped they did not heal quickly.

. . .

It was interesting, watching Sideswipe take so easily to Bumblebee after getting his repairs done. The red mech had not had the same bit of hesitation he had when seeing Jetfire and Jetstorm, although Ratchet suspected that his post-battle exhaustion had been a large factor in that. Bumblebee, though? The little mechling had simply pointed at him and demanded “who”, and it appeared Sideswipe was a goner. He just snatched the sparkling from Optimus and chattered away a mile a minute with him. And Bee just nodded or chirped back happily at him as Sideswipe just… *talked.* It was the most Ratchet had ever heard the youngling say at once, which was saying a lot since Sideswipe would gladly chatter Ratchet’s helm off.

Optimus actually allowed Sideswipe to watch Bumblebee, which had startled all of his close friends in the command staff. Optimus had avoided battles for decaorns even after Ratchet had cleared him, just because he had trouble being away from his precious, tiny sparkling. Yet, the red mechling seemed to win over both Bumblebee and Optimus Prime enough to be allowed babysitting duty. Ratchet suspected part of it may have been because the youngling had plastered himself to Ratchet's side since being allowed out of a berth. Even when Sideswipe was watching Bee, he stayed in the medbay or the quarters he had decided he was now sharing with Ratchet. Occasionally, he made his way to the rec room, but still found all the other bots pushing and shoving at times to be a tad overwhelming. So, the two were hardly ever truly unsupervised.

Having Bumblebee around also helped distract his charge from his brother, which proved to be a difficult task otherwise. Ratchet had resigned himself to simply setting up another medberth as a sleeping place for sideswipe across from his Sunstreaker's to keep the red youngling from climbing into the berth with his brother at night. Getting Sides to leave the medbay without Bumblebee was next to impossible. Ratchet had even taken to using Bee needing a wash as a reason to get Sides to *finally* wash himself off.

Even with all the quirks, Ratchet could not deny that the youngling was gradually worming his way into Ratchet's spark. Ratchet watched with what he had accepted was a certain level of fondness as Sideswipe sat on the floor with Bee, telling the little mechling *war stories*, of all things. The medic's spark ached, knowing that a youngling of not even forty vorns should not have war stories to share. Definitely none of his own, with scars to match. He wanted desperately to lock Sideswipe away, as well as his twin whenever he came out of stasis.

He watched as Sideswipe pointed to a scar along his arm, starting to open his mouth in his excitement as he went through the scars. Suddenly, that bright, lively expression Sides almost always wore fell away and he slumped some. His optics dimmed a tad, and the little sparkling chirped at him curiously. He shook his head, whispering, "It's… uh, it's nothing, Bee."

Ratchet had moved to kneel beside them, startling the youngling as he spoke and place a gentle hand on his shoulder strut. "Sides… what happened?" He could guess, from how Sideswipe suddenly went so uncharacteristically quiet. It was either self-inflicted or from his twin, and Ratchet was not sure which was more upsetting.

Crimson optics flickered up to him, swimming with uncertainty. Skinny red arms wrapped around Bee, holding the sparkling tighter to him. Sides shook his helm, resting it atop Bee's and whispering a soft "no". Bee whirred unhappily, patting Sideswipe's light armor. Bee nestled his helm in the crook of Sides' neck, wrapping tiny arms around it in a hug. Ratchet rubbed soft circles into the plating along Sides' back, waiting for him to uncurl some. He would not press, not when the mechling currently only really trusted him out of all the Autobots around them. He would not squander that trust.

"We had to get out. It- it wasn't Sunny's fault. He didn't know." The red twin sounded desperate to convince not only Ratchet, but also himself. "I-it was the thing! The th-thing that *he* made. Sunny would never hurt me!"

And it made sense then to Ratchet. It all clicked into place. Battle protocols were not installed until a mechling was nearly a hundred vorns old generally, although they had been doing it as early as seventy vorns in recent times. Any sooner than fifty, though, and there were often serious side effects to the youngling's psyche. Sideswipe and Sunstreaker were not even forty vorns old yet, and obviously had them installed with how they fought their way out of Shockwave's compound and Sideswipe's many war stories from the Rings. Primus only knew when they had been installed. If the battle protocols had split off, developed a personality and mind of their own… Well, Ratchet would need to keep an optic on them both. Battle profiles were dangerous, and often nearly impossible to delete.

Ratchet continued to rub between the other's shoulders, humming softly. A note was added to each of the twins' medical files about this new development, something Ratchet honestly should have suspected sooner but had not. Ratchet watched as Bumblebee mimicked him, patting Sides' shoulder. It took many kliks, but eventually Sideswipe started to loosen up. Ratchet slipped Bumblebee away from Sides', earning protests from both of them. He hushed them both with a gentle, "shush", moving to shut the lights off in the medbay. "I feel like you two could use a nap. Sound like a good idea, Bee?" He was unsurprised to get a little nod and a yawn from Bee, who was rubbing a fist at one of his optics. Ratchet looked to where Sides had been sitting, only to find he had already moved to the berth he had claimed and was halfway to recharge already.

Without another word, Ratchet laid Bee down with Sideswipe, pulling a soft blanket over the two and making sure the temperature was set properly for them, as all three of the mechlings in his medbay were

still too young to properly control their own body temperatures in recharge. They were both recharging peacefully in an instant, and with one last check to make sure Sunstreaker was still alright as well, Ratchet headed into his office to get some work done in quiet for the first time since Sideswipe had made an appearance.

He found he did not like the silence anymore. Perhaps Wheeljack would come sit with him while the mechlings all napped. That would certainly solve the silence problem. He probably would not get much work done, though. Oh well.

. . .

Wheeljack absolutely adored Sideswipe. Ratchet had to force the scientist out of the medbay at night so the youngling would actually go to sleep. The two had hit it off immediately, which was turning out to be unfortunate for Ratchet as he did not think he could deal with the spark attack that was both his sparkmate and the youngling he was looking after showing up covered in burn marks from explosions more than once. The one time was not *completely* horrendous, if only because Sideswipe showed up with Wheeljack cackling like a crazy mech while the scientist actually looked somewhat ashamed for blowing something up again. Ratchet would let it slide that one time, though. Just because it lightened up the young mech's mood so much.

Turned out that Sideswipe actually had a knack for mechanics, and Wheeljack was pretty sure that he could get the little mech to pick any other scientific focus up pretty easily. As much as both of the older mechs hated to consider it, it did look like the young mech took after Shockwave when it came to his intelligence. Neither of them dared to say that aloud around Sideswipe; if anyone so much as started to allude to Shockwave around Sideswipe, the poor mech completely shut down. Ratchet could not blame him, especially with the bits and pieces he had been able to get out of the youngling about his life with Shockwave. He was honestly amazed that the youngling was as well-adjusted as he seemed to be. Older mechs had cracked spending only a few orns in Shockwave's grasp, let alone their entire lives.

Part of that was what made Wheeljack want to adopt the mechling and his brother. They were obviously survivors, and any younglings Ratchet or Wheeljack were ever going to raise would have to be. Especially since they would be raised on base. Kindling was also a very difficult process, and neither of them particularly wanted to. In Wheeljack's processor, it all made sense. "It's meant to be, Ratch!" Wheeljack had proclaimed, seeming so sure. He had a faceplate

splitting grin and Ratchet could feel the excitement rolling off of Wheeljack's field in waves as they lay in berth together that night.

That made what Ratchet felt he had to say even worse. "No, 'Jack."

His sparkmate's normally open, playful field was suddenly pulled so tightly to the other's armor that Ratchet was only aware of the hurt and confusion in it because he rested a hand on the other's side. "No? Why not? It's obvious Sides like us both." And Wheeljack was not wrong.

Ratchet could not keep those two younglings any closer to the war, though. They had been created for *war*. He would not keep them near fighting, would not risk them joining it. They deserved a proper younglinghood, one that they could not give them. The twins would be safer sent off to a neutral colony, where they could actually be younglings. Ratchet explained this all to Wheeljack, voice soft because he needed to be sure it was not because he thought Wheeljack would not be a good creator. Anyone who saw how Wheeljack was with any of the younglings or sparklings on the base knew that the mech would make a great creator one day. This was about two younglings that had not been allowed to act like younglings having the chance to finally do just that. "No matter how much you and I both want to give them a happy life, the one they deserve, you *know* that we can't." Ratchet whispered sadly.

"No, we don't know that. We can't know that unless we try, slag it!" Wheeljack insisted, moving away from Ratchet as he sat up. The medic reached a hand towards the other's, watching the white mech lightly swat his hand away. He frowned some, not used to 'Jack ever brushing him off. It was usually the other way around. That hurt, honestly, but Ratchet said nothing and just pulled his hand back. "They like *us*, Ratch. What is so wrong with *trying*? Sure, maybe they can try living a normal life in a Neutral colony, but what if that colony gets attacked? What if they *die* because of it? They are safest here, with us and the Autobots. And, honestly, I think they'll be happier here, too. You're just too worried to let anyone else in. It's too late, though."

Ratchet lay there stunned by the outburst as Wheeljack got out of the berth and rushed away, likely to the lab. Where had all of that possibly come from? And since when was Ratchet "too worried to let anyone else in"? He had let Wheeljack in, obviously, and all of the other commanding officers. Most of the mechs around base he would call friends. It had nothing to do with any sort of insecurities 'Jack

thought Ratchet had. Those two younglings deserved much better than they could ever give them in the middle of a war. They were both officers, and as such, would often be required to work horrendous hours and go to all sorts of meetings and occasionally into battle. Younglings deserved someone to be around for them, to be there to make sure they ate properly and went to recharge at proper times. Ratchet and Wheeljack could not guarantee that.

No matter how much he wanted to.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

> I am so sorry for the delay. Graduating college and starting a job was more chaotic than expected lol here is this chapter. It was originally longer, but I prefer how it flowed without the last bit, so I'll post that as another chapter either later today or sometime tomorrow.

“Can you change the color of my optics?” Sideswipe’s whisper nearly startled Ratchet enough for him to weld his finger to the plate beneath his hand. He cast a concerned look over his shoulder, taking in the mechling. Sideswipe was sat at the smaller desk behind his, turned around on his stool. Ratchet had put that in recently for Sideswipe to work on schoolwork where he could keep an optic on him. Sideswipe was avoiding optic contact, hands wringing together in his lap.

The timidness in his normally confident charge was more than concerning. He set his torch aside, levelling Sideswipe with a curious look. “Why would you want me to do that? Did someone say something? You don't need to. I’ll handle any mechs giving you a hard time.”

Ratchet caught the barest quiver of Sides’ chin before suddenly he burst into tears, throwing the medic for a loop. He had never seen Sideswipe this distraught, although he had not really known the youngling for that long – a decaorn was nothing for beings that lived millennia occasionally. That made it no less concerning, though; not even when he had talked about his brother injuring him had Sideswipe been quite as upset. He reached out, gently pulling Sideswipe towards him and holding him tightly. Something had to be *wrong*. He just could not guess what.

It took several kliks of sobbing before Sideswipe was able to get an answer out. Ratchet had to ask him to repeat, keeping his tone soft to try and ease the poor sparklings nerves. “I-I don’t wanna look like *him*.”

Ah. Shockwave. The scientist with the large, crimson optic. The exact same color that Sideswipe and his brother had, passed down from their psychotic carrier. The same mech that Ratchet had yet to get Sideswipe to talk to anyone about. He had not thought to, wanting to wait until Sunstreaker awoke from his system repairs and after the

two adjusted more. The other should be up any orn now; he had thought it could wait.

He realized with a sigh that he had been wrong. He grabbed Sideswipe gently by his shoulders, holding the youngling back some so he could look him in the optics. “If you are sure you want me to, I can. It is a pretty easy mod.” Which was the truth, and he would gladly do the procedure for the youngling if he never had to see him cry like this ever again. “But I want you to be absolutely certain this is what you want. While I can change it back, it is best to not do too many modifications on a young mech. It could cause you to be short.” A light flick of the other’s chin at that got Sides giggling softly, a tiny grin forming on his faceplate. A similar one pulled at Ratchet’s own faceplate, an odd warmth settling in his spark. “There’s the Sides’ I know.”

The youngling stuck his glossa out jokingly, swatting at Ratchet's hands. “I’m not gonna be short. Apparently our s-sire was *huge*, so Sunny and I are definitely gonna be tall.” Ratchet took note of how Sides has just barely stumbled over the word sire, and how he did not even bring up Shockwave's size. The subject was definitely going to be a problem one day, likely for Sunstreaker as well.

For now, though, he had to discuss programming a safe mod for Sideswipe (and Sunstreaker, just in case) with Wheeljack, who had spent the last few orns with Perceptor, avoiding him. He was hoping beyond hope that it did not result in another fight over the twins. Ratchet had made up his mind on the matter, and while none of his friends would give him any sort of advice on the situation, he felt his decision was right. The twins would be safe with a neutral colony somewhere away from the war. They had seen too much of it already. Ratchet would not force them to inevitably see more.

. . .

“I look like you now,” Sideswipe chirped immediately upon seeing his reflection, turning to beam up at Ratchet with happy, bright blue optics. The medic could not suppress his own happy little grin at that, lightly pushing at the mechling. They did not look alike, aside from the optic color. Sideswipe’s red was much more vibrant than the bits of red in Ratchet’s own paint. Ratchet also had a much bulkier frame than either of the two newest mechlings who were bound to grow taller than him soon enough.

They took after their carrier, as much as Sideswipe seemed to want to

deny that. Ratchet saw it every time Sideswipe powered through his science and math lessons like nothing, but could not bring himself to do his history work. He saw the fear of that, too, any time Ratchet, Wheeljack, or any of the others tried to nurture that love for science. Sideswipe would immediately retreat into himself, refusing to do anything other than play with Bee or watch a holovid. Then he would turn around and pull off an elaborate prank, building all sorts of contraptions or mixing various compounds to make explosives.

It hurt to see Sideswipe use such a gift for mere pranks and destruction. But he would not push the mechling into anything he did not want to do. He would let him live his life happily, as any youngling should. Sunstreaker as well, whenever he woke up. His system was moving much slower than it should have, which was extremely worrying to Ratchet. It was likely either a product of malnourishment, or the damage done to both of the twins' sparks. Perhaps even both. Which still upset the younger twin greatly.

So, if letting the youngling think he looked like the medic made it easier for him for a short while, who was he to deny the other that. He nodded. "Yeah, you kinda do. Although, your red is a lot nicer than mine."

Sideswipe giggled some, shrugging. "Sunny complains if I don't stay nice and shiny, so I always make sure to wax."

That was peculiar, and something Ratchet definitely needed to make note of. OCD tendencies were uncommon in mechlings their age, and those that did surface were generally very extremely later in life. "Why does Sunny complain?" Ratchet probed, wanting to be somewhat sure of anything before he added anything to Sunny's chart.

Sides just shrugged, still admiring his new appearance. "He's always complained. It makes him extremely…" He paused briefly, looking like he is searching for the right word.

"Anxious?" Ratchet offered. "Like there is a bug in his programming or something. Or like he needs to… keep moving. Manic?" The description had to be simple enough for Sideswipe to be able to relate to them, so Ratchet knew he was not recording the wrong thing. The youngling continued to consider these both for a minute, before nodding quickly. "Which one?"

"Manic." Sides answered quickly, nodding once more. "Like if he doesn't fix it immediately he'll die. He likes to be *pretty*." There was a

teasing lilt to Sides tone, a wicked little grin on his faceplate as he continued to inspect himself in the mirror. “I dunno why.”

“It just bothers him.” Ratchet supplied, making more notes he would inevitably have to pass on to Smokescreen one orn. Not then, though. He had a happy youngling by his side, and a sparkling asleep in the other room. They would need to check on Bee soon, as he would inevitably wake up and get into trouble. He took too much after his carrier sometimes. It drove Ratchet crazy.

Sideswipe suddenly snapped to attention, looking around quickly. Ratchet opened his mouth, ready to talk the youngling out if a panic before Sides' face split back into a grin. “Sunny!”

. . .

The little yellow sparkling was a startling surprise for Sunstreaker to spot when he finally onlined. If not for his arms being strapped down, he might have accidentally squashed the little thing. Instead, he simply blinked up at where it sat over his spark, bright blue optics practically beaming with joy. Little antennae flickered atop his helm as he chirped and whistled at Sunstreaker, tiny doorwings thrown back wide in excitement. The yellow twin was honestly at a loss for words, just staring at the happy creature and wondering how the frag he had wound up with the small thing after being reunited with Sideswipe. At least it was as cute as it was, or he might have been annoyed on top of confused.

‘Sides?’ He pushed out with his spark, searching for the other and noting that he was actually close by. He felt his twin’s flare of surprise, followed quickly by joy and a small amount of panic. He picked up hurried footsteps off to the side, turning his head in time with the sparkling to spot his brother and what appeared to be the medic from before. He took note of the comfortable way Sideswipe stood by the medic, and immediately began to question what these mech’s had done to his younger brother. They *hated* medics. What was going on?

“Sunny! Did Bee wake you?” Sideswipe snatched the little sparkling up, eliciting a bright peel of laughter from the tiny thing as Sideswipe…

Tossed him up and then held him close?

Sunstreaker blinked several times, just staring at his brother as the medic moved to the spark monitors nearby. Sideswipe’s optics were

wrong. They were *blue.* They had red optics, like their carrier. If not for the bond between their sparks, he might have thought that the mech before him was an imposter. He still thought it possible. Sideswipe was reckless, and not even close to gentle when it came to *anything*, yet there he stood, cradling that bright yellow sparkling close and cooing down at it. And his optics were red, not blue. This was *wrong*.

His voice came out a tad rough, “Who are you, and what did you do with my half-wit twin?”

“If I’m a half-wit, so are you,” The red mechling sang back, still focused on the sparkling. “We're half of the same spark.”

At least this imposter responded like his brother would.

The medic approached his berth, pulling a nearby stool up and sitting on it beside him and undoing his restraints for him to sit up. He did not. “Good to see you awake again, Sunstreaker. How are you feeling? Probably a bit stiff, I imagine. Anything sore, though?” He was being asked all of this while the mech ran some scans, a familiar red light washing over him. Was the mech asking him this to see if he would lie, to punish him? Sunny knew those scans would tell the medic if anything was still wrong with him. What was he supposed to say? He did not want to be beaten anymore. He did not-

‘*Ratchet won't hurt you,*' Sides assured him suddenly over the bond, sending waves of reassurance his way and reaching out to mesh their fields together. ‘*Ratchet is not like carrier was, or Hook even. Ratchet won't hurt us just for being alive. There is no wrong answer. Just tell him if anything hurts.*’ His twin nodded at him from the side where he still held the sparkling – Bee. If Sideswipe trusted the medic this much already, perhaps Sunny could as well.

He shrugged some, gesturing with a hand to his right shoulder. “It feels off. Like it isn’t completely in the socket, or something else is caught in there. And my right knee. I can’t feel it. They did something, and I guess you just didn’t notice it or whatever.”

Instead of hitting him and scolding him, much like he expected and was braced for, the medic just nodded and appeared to make note of this. “I’ll do some more in-depth scans for you in a bit. You okay to sit up completely for me now?” No commands, no harsh tones. Just easy, gentle vibes coming off the medic’s field in waves.

And excitement. That one perplexed Sunstreaker the most. Was this

medic really excited for him to be alright? Genuinely excited, and not just eager to have someone to experiment on like Shockwave always had been? He found that he had a really hard time telling the difference between his twin's excitement and that of the medic and the little yellow sparkling. They felt the same in many ways, and that confused Sunny. He found he did not know what to do, and simply lay there staring at the medic for far too long. He was waiting to wake back up in cell, where he belonged. No one was ever excited to see the twins outside of the pits.

"What's wrong with you?" Sunny asked bluntly, earning a snort from the medic and a squawk from his twin. "Seriously. You're excited to see me, and it doesn't seem… bad." He shuttered his optics a few times, even quickly rebooted his HUD. There were no errors. He was not imagining this all, amazingly. His fingers itched to draw his dagger, but did not. There was a sparkling near. He would not risk harming a sparkling.

Ratchet motioned for Sunny to sit up, frowning when Sunny still did not. "It's fine, mechling. I'm not gonna hurt you. Your brother can vouch for that much." His tone was easy but troubled; Sides would not have noticed those undertones, not like Sunny. He never paid enough attention. The medic was *worried*, though Sunny did not know whether it was for his sake or their own. "Now, sit up. Let me check out your shoulder strut, okay? I promise, I'll be as gentle as possible."

"Ratchet only hurts you when you're being stupid!" Sides chirped from the side, getting a glare from the medic. "He hit Ironhide with a wrench the other orn. It was really funny."

Sunny's optics snapped to Ratchet as he slowly sat up, one optic ridge arched. Was Ironhide not the Weapons Specialist? What sort of mechs were the Autobots? Or rather, what sort of mech was Ratchet? He had heard all sorts of stories of the mech, who was large and absolutely deadly in combat. He remembered Shockwave coming back from a battle severely injured because of the mech when they were only a few vorns old. And this medic had *hit* him?

A soft huff left Ratchet as he lightly began to exam Sunny's shoulder strut. "Sides, stop trying to make me look cool. You're having the exact opposite effect." His brother had said a quick apology before climbing onto the berth with Sunny, Bee still in his hold. Sunny's spark immediately lurched, frame tensing as Sideswipe drew closer and their fields mingled more. Ratchet took note of the way Sunny side-eyed him, holding back his laughter. Instead, he let the sadness

also caused by it settle in his spark for a moment. What had these two been through to cause Sunstreaker to react so badly to his twin sitting next to him during an examination? What had Hook and Shockwave done to these poor mechlings?

“Part of your armor back here is bent. A line got snagged on it.” Ratchet’s voice was slow and his tone even as he gently unhooked the line and watched the yellow twin’s posture slump a little in relief. “I can look at your knee later. Seems like Sideswipe is about to burst if I don’t let you two just talk.” He actually chuckled some at the embarrassed look he got from the other, but waved it off. “I’ll be in my office. *Stay out of trouble*.” He leveled Sides with a firm look, knowing very well how much trouble the youngling could get into on his own. He feared what he could do with his twin. “I’ll be back in a bit with some energon for the three of you, okay? Be careful with Bee, Sides.”

And he left them at that, the red mech already launching into a rant about this and that with Bee jumping in occasionally. Sunstreaker did not say a word throughout any of it.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

> This is a little later than I anticipated, but mostly because I was trying to get it to mesh with the next chapter. It wouldn't, so here it is. This thing is an emotional roller coaster for the next few chapters, so... yeah, just gonna warn you guys about that now.

Prowl and Optimus wanted someone to run a processor check on Sunny; one had been done on Sideswipe, so it only made sense. Ratchet had no problem with doing a check. His problem with it was *who* they wanted to do it. They were sending Jazz to do it. Jazz only did scans on threats, such as prisoners. Sunny was *not* a prisoner. He would not allow it. Absolutely not.

He would just do one first.

“Ratch, are you sure about this?” Wheeljack asked softly, standing off to the side a bit. Ratchet had called him in, just in case he actually needed to be pulled out. He doubted it, but his sparkmate had insisted. “Jazz wouldn’t hurt him. Y’know that. And Optimus has got a point. He was used as bait. Primus only knows what they did to him.”

Ratchet shook his head, “I-I know that Jazz won’t hurt hm. But Sunny doesn’t. He trusts me, ‘Jack. I have to do it.” Not only to protect Sunny, but to protect the others. Sunny was still a bit of a loose cannon. If he were to become startled and lash out, the mechling would not be able to live with himself. Ratchet had seen how much Sunny beat himself up over the scars Sideswipe had because of him. He could not let the youngling collect any more reasons to be guilty. “He won’t hurt me. Right?”

Sunny nodded quickly, eyeing Wheeljack still. This was his first time meeting the scientist, so he was still very wary around the other. He had not completely shut the mech out, though, so Wheeljack was counting it as a win. The medic had told him it could be worse.

Ratchet moved towards the youngling, holding a hand out. “I won’t hurt you, either. I promise.” He reached out with his field, letting it brush gently against Sunny’s. “Will you let me check your processor? I’ll need you to scoot forward a bit for me to jack in.” He guided Sunny forward, not saying anything as the mechling continued to eye Wheeljack. He would get used to him eventually. Jack would make

sure of it.

Right as Ratchet jacked into the port on the back of Sunny's helm, the youngling tensed up. The medic worried some at that, but pressed on. He thought nothing of it, knowing full well that Sunny likely had no good memories of this procedure. He moved slowly, probing at his first few walls. None of them were particularly difficult for him to get through, although he imagined it may have been much worse if Sunstreaker was actually fighting him. He wanted to ask about the number of firewalls after the fifth one, because most mechlings had no more than three. The second he began to work on the sixth one, however, he felt Sunny tense up.

Wheeljack yanked Ratchet out quickly, the medic losing his footing and sending them both crashing to the ground. All he could hear was screaming. It was not him, or Jack… had someone come in? Did they hurt Sunstreaker? What was going on? He struggled to clear his head; his HUD kept overloading his processor with warning after warning. Something was wrong.

"-ome on, Ratch. Please." Wheeljack was speaking. Someone was still screaming in the background. Were they under attack? "Slag it. I've gotta get Jazz. Sides, go get Jazz!"

"B-but Sunny-" Sides had been in the other room when they started. Ratchet remembered that. He had been with Bee. And the screaming definitely was not him or Bee. Was Sunny hurt? Had Ratchet hurt Sunny? He had promised he would not.

"*Go*!" Wheeljack sounded terrified. Ratchet needed to clear all these damn warnings so he could actually think properly and talk some sense into the other. He needed to make sure Sunstreaker was alright as well. He would not stop screaming.

It took all of his will power, but Ratchet finally got moving. He was sitting up, doing his best to ignore Wheeljack's crying and Sunstreaker's screaming as he got his vision cleared enough to see around him. He had a horrid processor ache, and his entire body felt stiff and heavier than usual. He needed to move, though. "Sunny," Ratchet managed to get out. Wheeljack was clinging to him, rambling about something Ratchet could not be bothered to try to understand at the moment. "Sun-"

A smaller form was leaping over Ratchet in an instant, quickly grabbing a hold of Sunny where Ratchet could just barely see him

curled up on the berth. A silver hand reached out to touch Sunstreaker, not yielding even when the mechling lashed out. “J-jazz. Stop.” Ratchet forced out, but the saboteur ignored both him and Sunstreaker. Ratchet watched worriedly as Jazz hooked up to Sunstreaker, fearing the worst. “Stop!”

The room went quiet, or mostly so. The only audible noises were his own systems working harder than they should have been and pathetic mewls now coming from Sunstreaker. Jazz was still holding Sunstreaker, having unhooked from the youngling and now instead trying to hush his crying. “I gotcha, Sunshine. I gotcha.”

Ratchet almost cried tears of joy when Sunny could be heard whispering, “Don’t call me Sunshine.” He was okay. Thank Primus.

Jazz snorted, “Whatever ya say, younglin’.”

They were quiet for a long moment, Ratchet still trying to gather himself as Wheeljack continued to cling tightly to him. He was aware of Sideswipe coming back without Bee, who likely had been snatched up by Optimus at the slightest thought of danger befalling his precious sparkling. Neither twin spoke, which Ratchet found was not uncommon for them. When talking to each other, the only clue that they were was how they still gestured as if they were speaking. He watched as Sideswipe crept closer, eyeing both Ratchet and then Jazz. The silver mech patted the space on the berth next to him and Sideswipe was climbing up in an instant. “First Aid is on his way.” Jazz said softly. “He’ll look over Sunny, and then take care of Ratchet.”

“What’s wrong with him?” Sides asked softly, cuddling close to Sunny as he looked cautiously over to Ratchet and Wheeljack. Ratchet was ready to say nothing, but Jazz of course spoke first.

“It’s just a little virus. Something I am sure that Shockwave planted for us to find. They’ll both be fine once First Aid gets here.” Jazz assured, and Ratchet tried to rise to protest. His body was working against him. More and more errors were clouding his vision. As much as he hated to admit it, Jazz was right. There was a virus attempting to reach havoc on his system. Thankfully, his system’s firewalls were extremely advanced, as was required of any medic. The virus, no matter how aggressive, would take decacycles to shut him down.

He should have noticed the virus before it could latch onto him, and was sure he would have if it were planted by anyone other than

Shockwave. If he had been focused on anything other than making sure he did not startle Sunstreaker. It hit him out of nowhere, the realization that he cared so much about these two random mechlings that he was ditching protocol and nearly got them both killed. He was emotionally compromised, as much as he had refused to see it at first. He could have gotten Sunstreaker killed by that virus, and Sideswipe as well in the process. He would not have been able to live with himself if that had happened.

A hand against his cheekplate had his attention focusing in on Wheeljack. The mech had a soft look on his face, although Ratchet could still sense the panic beneath the surface. '*You couldn't hide that you had feelings forever, Ratch.*' The other's tone was affectionate, but did nothing to quell the fear in Ratchet's spark. He could have gotten them killed. He was reckless. The twins needed to be as far away from him as possible. It was for their own safety.

'*And if they want to stay?*' Wheeljack asked.

'*They won't. Not after this.*'

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

> Ayyyy, this one didn't take forever for me to get around to uploading it. It will likely be another week before I upload the next couple chapters, though. I start work this week, and have so much training it is not even funny. Yay engineering. >.>

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The younglings wanted to stay with Ratchet. Even after everything that had happened, and at Ratchet's own insistence that they could find them a nice family in a neutral colony, they still said they wanted to stay with Ratchet. The medic really should not have been surprised – no one else was. Wheeljack was excited, and had gone about adding another room onto their quarters. That made what Ratchet felt he had to do while watching his sparkmate get ready for them to move in even worse. So he just came out with it. He was worried about Sunny being able to handle Wheeljack's energy. The mechling could barely handle his own twin!

Wheeljack stared at him, stock still for several moments. Ratchet worried the other had glitched until he finally shuttered his optics before asking, "Are you serious?"

"Just for a few orns, alright? Decacycle at most." Ratchet promised, taking a quick few steps into Wheeljack's personal space to grab his servos in his. "For them to both settle. They came from a really rough place, and I want them to be able to settle in completely before we try to… push *us* on them, okay? Especially Sunny. That mechling needs *time*."

Wheeljack snorted, "He needs *love*, Ratch, and guidance. You and I both know the last thing that mechling needs is isolation." There was an edge to his voice, like a building rage. He could feel it across their bond. Wheeljack was already attached, and he had barely spoken to Sunny. The sparkling struggle to even sit next to Wheeljack in the medbay, but he had yet to turn the scientist away, so Wheeljack thought it was a success. Ratchet thought it was more of a warning.

"I'm not isolating them!" His exasperation was evident. *This* was why he wanted them to have a few orns to settle in. Wheeljack was such an emotional mech at times. He worried about how Sunny would handle

being around it constantly. He did not want either of them to get hurt again. “I'm protecting them!”

Frag. Wheeljack flinched back from that, fins going completely dim as the mech somehow shrunk in on himself. With the barest little flicker of his fins, he asked, “From me, right? Worried I'll blow them up?”

Ratchet let out a groan, “You know that’s not it!”

“It sure feels like!” And the fire was back in Wheeljack’s voice. He was stepping in to Ratchet’s space, field full of anger and hurt. “Name one good reason why I *shouldn’t* be here, and then I’ll tell you at least 5 reasons why I should.”

He did not want to say it, the biggest reason. The main reason why he was sure Sunstreaker was still uneasy around the mech. It seemed he had no other choice, though. “Because of Shockwave. Sides may not seem to draw a connection between your occupation and his, but Sunny obviously does. And I don’t want him to accidentally lash out at you, or for you to get hurt by him ignoring you. He just… he needs time.” Ratchet wanted Sunstreaker to get used to one change at a time. Moving into their quarters and getting used to the base would already be difficult for the mechling. Adding in Wheeljack and all of his messes and craziness all the time was another thing entirely. He just did not want Sunny to see one part of Wheeljack’s work and hate him for it. It would devastate Ratchet to have to choose between the twins and Wheeljack. He did not think he could make that choice. This was just something temporary so he would not have to.

Wheeljack just shook his helm and stomped off to their room. Silence was never a good response from Jack, as Ratchet had learned. He stayed in the main room, waiting until Wheeljack finally came out. His field was held tightly to his frame. That was the most troubling part. He reached out for the other as he came closer, but he just kept walking. “You have a single decacycle, Ratchet. That’s it. I-I’ll be staying with Percy.”

And with that, Wheeljack left. It hurt, but Ratchet reminded himself that it was only for a decacycle. Wheeljack would be back in their quarters soon enough, and his sparkmate could have his little dream family. Everything would be alright.

. . .

The younglings clung tightly to his sides as they walked into his – *their* – quarters. Both of them looked around with wide optics, taking

everything in. He could feel the excitement in Sideswipe's field, and was pleasantly surprised to feel that in Sunny's as well. He guided them through the main room to the add-on. Wheeljack had helped in fill in with toys and other things the youngling might like, insisting when Ratchet had mentioned intending to do so. There was a delightfully Wheeljack touch to some of the gifts, especially the brightly colored paints and datapads loaded full of books.

They entered the room slowly, taking in everything around them. Sideswipe went about touching everything, excitement coming off of him in waves. Sunny hung back near the entrance. There was a hunt of concern under his own excitement. Ratchet touched his shoulder lightly to get his attention, urging him to look. When the youngling still did not move, Ratchet asked instead, "Is something wrong, Sunstreaker?"

"There're two berths." Sunny mumbled, gesturing to them both. Sideswipe had already clambered up onto one, looking through one of the many datapads.

"We've never had our own berths," Sides tacked on, grinning over at Ratchet. "Except in the medbay. But those don't count as real berths."

Sunny did not seem to be as enthused as Sides was. He eyed the bed opposite the one Sides was on warily before finally moving and joining his twin on the other. Sides said nothing against it, instead chattering at his twin and showing him the datapad. So Sunny was unsure about sleeping alone. He had not seemed to struggle too much with it in the medbay. But he had noted that the twins would often hold hands across them, and would sit beside each other on one berth during the orn.

Ratchet moved over to the other berth, sitting on it and looking across to the twins. "Would you two prefer it if I pushed them together?" That got him a shy shrug and a definite nod. He gave them both a small smile. "That's fine for now. You two are going to need to sleep in your own separate berths eventually, though. Okay?" With the help of the twins, they rearranged the room how the twins wanted it. Once it had both the Sides and Sunny seal of approval, Ratchet left them to their room. Just as he shut the door, he heard Sunny grumbling at Sides to make sure he did not knock over his paints.

Wheeljack was standing in the main room when Ratchet exited the room, startling the medic some. The scientist held his hands up before speaking. "I'm not here to stay. I just… I wanted to see if maybe the

twins would want to eat together and play a few board games that I snagged from Jazz." He said this all quickly, with his field pressed tightly to his frame and their bond shut so nothing leaked out. Jack looked like he had not recharged in a few orns, though. It had been rough for Ratchet recently as well, so he could not blame him.

With a soft sigh, Ratchet nodded. "Alright. That's fine. But, if something seems off, we'll have to call it for the orn, Jack. I don't want them to hate you."

"Hate who?" Sides chirped, poking his head out of the door from behind Ratchet. It startled both mechs, who looked to him quickly. He spotted Wheeljack, waving happily at the other mech. "Hi, Jack! Sunny and I spilled paint all over the floor!" Both mechs could distinctly make out Sunstreaker yelling from the room that he did *not* spill anything and had to fight the urge to laugh.

Ratchet turned a soft smile to Wheeljack, reaching his field out to the other's. "Want to help me wash the twin terrors before eating?"

The grin he got in return was absolutely blinding. "Of course."

. . .

"Are the optics so mechs can tell us apart? Cause they already could. We're different colors." Sunstreaker grumbled, nudging his twin over on the berth as he slipped under the covers. It had been a very exciting day, with getting their own room and then Wheeljack coming over. On top of the last few orns spent in the medbay because of that virus, he had not had a chance to really ask his twin about the mod. "Or is it so you fit in more?" He could not fathom changing something he felt was so integral to what he was – what *they* were. They were not Autobots, not by birth. Their carrier was the chief scientist for the Decepticons, and their sire was supposedly some sort of amazing frontliner. They had killed, as well. They were *not* Autobots. They could pretend to be all they wanted, but Sunstreaker knew there would always be that small part in the depths of their sparks and processors that knew otherwise, that craved the chaos and fighting that came with war and the rings.

Sides huffed some, rolling onto his side so his back was to Sunstreaker. The other took that as an invitation to just press closer. "It is because I want to distance myself from *him*. I-I don't want to be *evil*, Sunny. We're not evil."

The yellow twin rolled his optics at that, allowing Sideswipe to

entertain the idea that they were not made from evil, formed by it. That maybe, just maybe, they could be good. Sunstreaker knew better, though, could feel the truth of it all deep in his spark. They were not *evil*, per se; they were the physical embodiment of chaos. They were intended to destroy. That was all they had ever done. They were the Twin Terrors for a reason, a name they had earned a thousand times over in the rings. It was not some endearing term, not how Ratchet used it now. They got it because they killed, and they did so with no remorse. They never hesitated. Until Shockwave pitted them against each other, that is. The ultimate test, he had called it. Could they kill each other? Seemed like a waste, given all the trouble Shockwave went through to get their sparks linked together like they were, but it had happened. And for several moments, Sunstreaker had not hesitated. He had gone at Sideswipe like he would any other opponent, and the idiot had just let him. Sideswipe had simply let Sunny beat away at him, as if he knew his twin would snap out of it eventually.

That was how Sunstreaker knew there was something wrong with them, that they did not belong here. The only thing that stopped him from tearing off his twin's helm was the pain it had sent through his spark as well. Not because he recognized his brother. Not because he loved him, which he knew he did. Because it hurt, and that was what had pulled him from his rage. The pain. Not his brother crying for him, begging him to come back to him. He *hurt*, so he had stopped. No normal mech could do that, could beat their twin – their other half – to a pulp like he had.

It was then that he had snatched Sides up and made a break for it. The two fought like they would not live to see another day when trying to get out of the damn Rings and away from Shockwave. Pit, they almost did not. It had taken every bit of his strength to will his brother to keep running when Skywarp had snagged him. To scream across their bond to get away, to get to freedom, before slamming it closed as best he could to keep out the pain he knew would come.

He scratched at his shoulder some, the socket still not quite sitting right. He would need to tell Ratchet eventually, but part of him did not want to. This was his penance for nearly taking bright, happy Sideswipe from the world, for almost keeping his twin and the medic apart. "I think that is just who we are," Sunstreaker said softly after a moment, only able to remember that deep, burning rage while he beat his little brother into the floor of the arena. "We're *Shockwave's*, whether the old Hatchet wants to admit it or not. Maybe it is just in our CNA."

Sides scowled, nudging Sunstreaker roughly and almost knocking him off the berth. “You can’t mean that. Not after all the Pit he put us through.”

“It’s the truth!” Sunny snapped, temper flaring suddenly. “It’s who we are! We aren’t Autobots. We’re… I dunno, but we aren’t Autobots.”

Sideswipe huffed, getting up from the berth suddenly and hurrying across the room. “Maybe you aren’t, but that doesn’t mean I’m not either. I’m my *own mech*, Sunny.” And he was gone, leaving the yellow mechling alone to just stare at the doorway where that bright red frame had once been.

They needed to get away from here. It was changing Sideswipe, and Sunstreaker did not like it.

Chapter End Notes

> Yeah, this whole thing is gonna be one wild ride for the twins. Get used to Sunny being on the fence about all this for a bit.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

> So, the next few chapters are gonna jump about a little bit, just because I am trying to get to some really good bits. Also, we have hit 100 pages in word of this bitch, so yeah. And we still aren't done. I've got a lot more editing to do on the next couple chapters before I am happy with them, but so long as work doesn't get in the way, I should have that up in about two weeks.

A light knocking on his door had Ratchet sitting up from his berth, frowning some. He had thought the twins were asleep, but apparently not. He sent the command for the door to open, and in came Sideswipe. His little faceplate was drenched in tears, and his field was full of distress. Without a word, Ratchet reached out and pulled him onto the berth. Sides quickly buried his face into Ratchet's chestplate, frame trembling some. Ratchet's engine purred softly, trying to ease the youngling's crying. "What happened, Sides?" At the little shake of a helm he got in return, Ratchet sighed. Sides did not get this upset over nothing.

Ratchet settled back down on his berth, youngling curled up on his chestplate. He simply kept rubbing gentle circles in-between Sideswipe's shoulder struts. It had yet to fail him when comforting the youngling. Sometimes it just took a bit more time. Ratchet had plenty of time. His shift would not start for several more joors. Sideswipe would be talking by then, or asleep.

"Sunny is wrong." *And there he was.* He sounded so unsure of what he said, though. Which left Ratchet with a lot of questions, but one needed answering first.

"What did Sunny say?" Ratchet feared the worst; that Sunny *wanted* to go back to the 'Cons. He had thought they were adjusting well, and that Sunny liked spending time with him. He could not help but fear that was all an act, though; a profile created from vorns of having to do as you are told or be subject to more of Shockwave's experiments.

Sides found a way to press tighter against Ratchet, muttering out, "He says we're evil. That we're not Autobots."

That was only the tiniest bit better than what Ratchet had anticipated. He was not saying he wanted to go back to the 'Cons. What he was

saying was barely better, though. It made anger it caused in Ratchet was the same. Because he had watched the twins for many decacycles now, and knew there was not a drop of evil in their small frames. They were barely out of sparklinghood. They did not truly understand what it meant to be evil, even having lived with it up until now. How could Sunny say such a thing?

“He’s wrong.” Ratchet assured Sideswipe, stamping his anger down for now. “You know that. He is just scared. This is all new to the both of you. He probably is having trouble adjusting.” Ratchet hoped he was, anyway. He did not think he would know what to do if that were not the case.

“… what if he’s not?” Sides asked softly, startling the medic. Bright blue optics peered up at him, looking so lost and unsure. Those were not the optics of a Decepticon, even when they had been crimson. Sideswipe was not evil. Neither was Sunstreaker.

Ratchet settled Sideswipe onto the berth beside him, startling the youngling some until Ratchet pulled the blanket up over them both. “He is wrong. I know it. I saw nothing evil in your processor. I would know, right?” Sides seemed to mull that information over, before finally nodding to Ratchet. “Exactly. Let’s just recharge now. You’ll feel better after some rest.” He assured, waiting until he heard Sides’ systems cycle down before doing so himself.

Sunny was waiting at the table early the next orn, a cube of energon in his small hand that he did not seem interested in eating. He perked up some when Sides exited Ratchet’s room with him, grinning at his twin. He had not yet picked up on the tension in Ratchet’s shoulder struts. The medic’s field was pulled tightly to his frame. He got a cube for Sideswipe, who took a seat next to his brother, and grabbed one for himself. He sat down across from the younglings, sipping at his energon lazily.

He was waiting. Sunny could tell. It put him on edge. He had done something wrong. What had he done wrong?

After finishing his cube, Ratchet finally looked to Sunstreaker. The youngling was not eating, staring at Ratchet like he was ready to run at a moment's notice. Like Ratchet suddenly had one bright red optic and a love for torturing mechs. It hurt somewhat, but he pushed it aside. “Sunny.” His voice was low, although it still startled Sideswipe some. “Sides told me something… troubling.”

Ah. That made sense to Sunstreaker. His frame relaxed a bit. He did not think Ratchet would hurt him. But he was ready. He was always ready. “That we're evil.” He supplied. It was the truth. As much as he also hated it, it was the truth. He could feel it in his spark.

“And why would you say that?” Ratchet countered, a slight edge to his voice as he spoke.

Sunny shrugged, ignoring his twin's pleading over the bond for him to just shut up. “Because I feel it. We just are.”

The medic's brow plates furrowed some. “No. I've seen your processor, mechling. Both of yours. Neither of you show any of the usual signs of insanity. You're not evil.”

He got another shrug in response. “It's in my CNA. My spark. Shockwave said so." His voice sounded so sure that it broke Ratchet's spark. He would rip Shockwave's spark from his chest one orn for what he did to these younglings. They did not deserve this.

“You really think you’re evil? Really? Fine, then do you want to go to the brig?” There was disbelief and anger in the medic’s voice that Sunny did not expect. He wanted to get up from the table and run. Ratchet was never like that. He shrunk back in his seat some, trying to get as far from the medic while still being seated as possible. Ratchet was not having it, however. He stood up, moving around to Sunny’s seat and kneeling down. “If you are so evil, do it. Kill me.”

What. Sunny shook his head, because he could not kill Ratchet. He would not. The medic had been so surprisingly kind to him since he had woken up finally. Sides also loved Ratchet, so Sunny could never kill him. He could not cause his twin that much sparkbreak. “I don’t wanna.” He managed, averting his optics.

“You’re evil, though, right? So take out that dagger I know you’ve been hiding and kill me.” Ratchet insisted, taking Sunny’s chin in his fingers and turning his head. The touch was still gentle, but he could feel the anger in Ratchet’s field still. “If you’re really evil, it shouldn’t matter. You should be able to just do it. Kill me. Do it.”

He would not move. He would not hurt Ratchet. Ratchet had yet to hurt him. He had no reason to hurt Ratchet. He continued to shake his little helm, bringing his knees to his chest and pressing his palms tightly to his audio receptors. His processor and his spark both ached, and he was not entirely sure why. Back with the Decepticons, he would have done it. Whenever someone ordered them to kill, Sunny

did it without a second thought.

He did not want to anymore, though.

When he finally broke, the medic pulled him tightly to his chest. When sobs racked his little frame, Ratchet's engine revved quietly to try and calm him. A hand stroked between his shoulder struts with just the right amount of pressure; grounding but gentle. “You're not evil.” Ratchet declared softly. “No matter what that mech said, you are *not* evil. You’re a bit of a brat, but not evil.” Ratchet teased lightly, holding the mechling close. Sideswipe came over, forcing his way into Ratchet’s hold as well. He clung to his brother and their caretaker, pressing tighter to his twin when Sunny whimpered softly.

They sat there until Sunny calmed down. There was nothing important for them to do that orn. No one was expecting them anywhere, and First Aid could handle the medbay just fine. Ratchet and his mechlings needed an orn. He needed to get them *both* to see that there was more to life than fighting and death and all of the chaos of the Decepticons. He wanted desperately to get Sunny to see he was better than them. So, he located some more paints and large canvases. It was so great to hear the two of the younglings giggle, getting paint all over Ratchet and each other. Ratchet felt dozens of vorns younger just being around it.

And if Wheeljack found them all later curled up in the middle of the main room, covered in paint and passed out, he never said a thing about it.

. . .

“Jetfire and Jetstorm are coming with Bee today.” Ratchet called from his office, neither of the twins looking up from their datapads. They had not really seen the younger twins since they arrived; the twins barely left Ratchet or occasionally Wheeljack’s side. “Bluestreak will be joining them as well.”

That got both of them looking at him. Sideswipe looked curious while Sunstreaker… well, he looked like Sunstreaker. That was about the only way Ratchet could come up with to describe it without it sounding rude. “Who’s that?” Sides chirped, setting his datapad aside.

“That is Prowl’s youngest brother. He generally watches the twins himself, but the twins wanted to be with Bee today.” Ratchet explained. “And Optimus is very… selective with who watches Bee.” Which was the nice way of putting that he trusted basically no one

with his sparkling but for some reason had come to trust Sideswipe with him in little time at all. How the mechling had pulled it off, none of the officers had figured out yet. They had all decided to not question it.

Of course, Sides could have cared less about that detail at the moment. “Prowl has more than one brother?” It was rare to have more than one sparkling, and even rarer to have twins. They knew that all too well; Shockwave had never let them forget how *special* they were. They knew the statistics. Sunny looked between his twin and Ratchet, processor trying to understand this new bit of information.

“He has two brothers. You’ll both meet Smokescreen eventually.” The medic assured. “He is a psychologist. Very good at what he does.” Ratchet forced down a chuckle at the scowl he suddenly got from both the twins. They were too smart for their own good, honestly. They caught on to things much too quickly. “Blue is only a few vorn older than you two. You’ll like him.”

Ratchet feared later that perhaps he was wrong. Sunstreaker spent the entire time Bluestreak was there glaring holes into the back of the other mechling’s helm. Of course, Blue was too busy rambling to Sideswipe to even notice. He had feared that the other’s… *glitch* might make it difficult for him to get along with the twins. Just Sunny not liking him at first was a huge success in Ratchet’s book. The yellow twin instead spent his time coloring with the sparklings, who were just amazed to get this much attention from the usually antisocial twin. Bee had sidled up right next to Sunny, and the twin had simply moved his arm so Bee could cuddle close while coloring. The jet twins were not far behind him.

And Blue and Sides just ignored them all the entire time.

Sunny was dead quiet at dinner, and Sides did not seem to really notice. He just chattered on and on about Bluestreak this and Bluestreak that. When can Blue come over next? Can Blue spend the night next time? Can he spend the night at Jazz and Prowl’s with Blue? It just kept coming and coming until finally Sunny snapped. His fist slammed down on the table, startling the other two. With a shove of his chair, he was storming off to their room. The door slammed shut behind him.

Ratchet sighed, telling Sideswipe to wait when he moved to rush after his twin. The mechling looked at him, brow plates furrowed in

confusion. “You know, you ignored Sunny for a lot of today.” Ratchet stated, prepared for Sideswipe to argue with him about that. That he *could not* really ignore Sunny.

He did not argue, though. Sides just looked down at the floor, almost as if he were ashamed.

“You’re all he has ever known, Sides,” Ratchet continued, moving around to kneel by the youngling. “He isn’t… naturally as social as you are. You know that. So it was hard to be pushed aside by you, even if you didn’t mean it.” Which was something else Ratchet needed to be concerned about. Sideswipe and Sunstreaker were not going to always be together. Eventually, Sunny would have to learn to be away from Sides. Especially if one or both of them joined the Autobots and were in different divisions. Maybe one of them would want to be a medic or a scientist, and the other a warrior of some sort. Maybe one of them would not join the war and would go off to a neutral colony. It would not do them any good if they could not handle being separated but still in the same room for even a few joors.

After he finally got Sideswipe to lay down with Sunstreaker, Ratchet called Wheeljack over. This was much more stressful than he had expected, and he had not even made it to an vorn yet. Wheeljack was of course as supportive as ever, offering to talk to the twins and maybe even get them in with Smokescreen soon. They needed it. Both of them knew it. Ratchet was just not as keen on the idea as Wheeljack was. “They’ve spent most of their lives with Shockwave knowing their every thought and move whenever he wanted.” Ratchet argued. “I won’t put them through that until they’re ready.”

“And if they’re never ready?” Wheeljack asked with an exasperated sigh. “Ratch, I understand why you are worried. I get it. But… they need this. And you know neither of us are meant for that sorta work. Hell, I’m barely allowed to work around other mechs. Smokey is their best chance at getting better.”

Wheeljack got a groan out of Ratchet, who just shook his helm. “Not yet. They- they need more time.”

“Do they need more time, Ratch?” Wheeljack snapped, startling his sparkmate. “Or do you?”

Optics flickered briefly at him. Ratchet’s field reached out to Wheeljack, worry ebbing in it. “Jack… is something else wrong?”

The scientist snorted at that, standing up from the table. “If you don’t

know, Ratch, then maybe you really are just that dense." And he stormed off, leaving Ratchet sitting there confused.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

> Alright, more relationship building and time-hopping shit. Next few chapters are where the story really starts to pick up. I'm also gonna go ahead and apologize for the feels I know they will cause.

Sideswipe and Sunstreaker had chiseled out a small amount of space for themselves in Ratchet's office, sitting there going over their lessons for the orn with minimal enthusiasm. It all seemed so dull to them. The math Ratchet had given them was not difficult at all, but neither of them had the spark to let him know. He was just trying to help, after all. Eventually he would catch on that they were beyond this.

The twins usually uneventful orn was abruptly interrupted when mechs were suddenly rushing into the medbay and they were being rushed out. They caught something about someone injured on a recon mission, but knew nothing else as the medbay doors shut decisively behind them.

"Where do we go?" Sides asked, looking around the hallway and suddenly feeling infinitely smaller. There were a few mechs about, eyeing the twins some but not really saying much as they lurked outside the medbay.

Sunny glared about some, thinking. He tapped his foot on the ground some, probing his processor for any idea of what to do without Ratchet or their work that was left in his office. He eventually just shrugged turning to his left. "Let's just go see Wheeljack."

"… Jack's lab is this way, Sunny." Sides teased, grabbing his twin's hand and tugging him in the other direction. He liked the idea of going to see Jack. He probably would not make them do dumb schoolwork.

Sides was correct about that. Wheeljack had been extremely startled to have the twins suddenly come barreling into the lab. He was immediately chattering back and forth with Sideswipe, though, and gladly picking up one twin with each arm. They were just barely small enough for him to do this, but they both absolutely loved it. Perceptor just rolled his optics, shooing the three of them out of the lab. "I don't need to worry about another two mechs blowing everything up, thank

you." He grumbled, but his field oozed happiness.

"What should we do, Wheeljack?" Sides asked, giggling some.

Wheeljack was amazed to hear Sunstreaker giggling softly as well, both of them squirming some in his hold. "Can we play one of those board games you showed us?" And really, how could they possibly expect him to say no.

He would try to anyway. "Don't you both have studying to do?" After all, he had helped Ratchet make their lessons.

"Ratchet thinks we're stupid." Sunny groaned, and Sides nodded quickly in agreement.

"Well, that's definitely not true." Wheeljack countered quickly, although he made note of the mechlings' complaints for later. "How about I help figure out what is good for you? Yeah? And then you will have lessons good for both of you."

Sides made a face at that, but Sunny was nodding. "Can't we just play games?" Sides seemed less than enthused about having actually decent lessons to study. Having seen how much trouble he can get into when left alone, though, Wheeljack knew better than to just let him have his way. Sunstreaker also seemed pretty interested in getting something more up to snuff for them. So he had a plan for now.

It turned out to be a great plan, as well. The twins were leaps and bounds ahead of what they had anticipated, which was still ahead of where other mechlings their age would likely be. The only subject they lacked in was Cybertronian history, but they had all expected that given their upbringing. Wheeljack would kill to have even one of them eventually working under him, though. Sides and Sunny both were very scientifically inclined it turned out.

The second he said that, though, they both clammed up. And he knew instantly why. Shockwave had been the one to raise them until now, and barely at that. They had seen the worst side of science, had experienced it firsthand. It made sense that they were scared of that.

Wheeljack decided that he would help them not be.

. . .

Ratchet was exhausted when he finally made it back to their quarters. He stumbled through the door, glaring off to the side briefly when he

heard someone hushing him. Before he could open his mouth to complain at the twins, he felt Wheeljack's silent laughter through their bond. His optics snapped to the side and there he was, buried under two passed out twins. There were all sorts of tools and… *Primus only knew what* that Ratchet did not have the energy to ask about. Wheeljack just looked too pleased with himself for Ratchet to justify interrogating him and waking up the twins. Instead, he gave a fond shake of his helm before moving forward and scoping up Sideswipe carefully as Wheeljack finally picked up Sunny and stood to follow him. He heard Wheeljack cooing softly to Sunny behind him as the mechling stirred some, and felt his spark break a little.

He had been keeping Wheeljack from this.

After they got the mechlings settled into their berth, they slipped out and sat on the couch together. It had been a while since they had done this, both of them nursing a cube of high grade. It felt *right*, putting the twins to bed together and then just relaxing. This was how they were meant to be. Ratchet just… was worried about how the twins would take it. They could ease into it like this, though. It would work out in the end.

"Y'know, Ratch, they're both *really* smart." Wheeljack whispered eventually, leaning into Ratchet's side some. "Like… really, *really* smart. We don't have any premade lessons that would challenge them outside of history. We'll need to make something different for them. Maybe get Prowl involved."

Ratchet actually snorted at that. "I'm sure Prowl will love that. He thinks their nothing but trouble."

Wheeljack arched a brow plate at him. "Are you saying he is wrong?"

Ratchet's field bristled at that. "There is not a bit of bad in their frames," comes out in a hiss before he is trying to move from Wheeljack who held on and shushed him.

"You know that isn't what I meant." Ratchet did, too. He was just overreacting. He knew he was. But he found he could not help. He fought Sunny and Sides enough, always having to reassure one or both of them that they were not evil. He did not need Prowl or any other mech making it any harder for him. Wheeljack stroked a hand along his backstrut lightly. "They're just mischievous, Ratch. That's all I meant." The scientist nuzzled against him, fields melding together as Ratchet slowly relaxed. "They're good mechlings. Just like to get into

trouble.”

He managed a little nod, practically oozing into Wheeljack's touch now. “They are. They just need time for mechs to understand them. That's all.” Ratchet mumbled, optics shuttering briefly. The exhaustion from the day was hitting him *hard*. But he did not want to move. He had missed this. Had missed them. He did not want to move, because he did not want Jack to leave.

Warmth flooded their bond, his thoughts obviously having oozed over some. “I’m not going anywhere, Ratch. You know that. Let's… let's go lay down. Yeah?” Wheeljack sounded so unsure that Ratchet was suddenly swarmed with guilt.

He only nodded. What would one night hurt?

. . .

“Wheeljack should come over for dinner.” Sideswipe said decisively around midorn the following orn, his twin nodding firmly by his side where they sat across from their caretaker in the main room of their quarters. Ratchet arched an optic ridge at that, confused as to why they would ask such a thing but also slightly sparkbroken at how much Wheeljack should have been there already. “He’s fun. We like him. He should come over.”

Ratchet snorted some, hoping he kept his hurt from all of his bonds at that. “What did he blow up with you two this time?”

Sunny actually spoke up this time, which actually made Ratchet’s spark soar momentarily. “We didn’t blow anything up. He just… we like him. And he likes you. And we like you…” The youngling’s voice trailed off and Sideswipe wiggled his brow plates at him suggestively.

“And you like him.” Sides tacked on quickly.

Oh, Ratchet was in trouble.

“Now, what could have possibly given you two that idea?” The old medic grumbled, although he wore an easy expression and his field was completely relaxed. He did not want the twins to feel his unease at this line of questioning, when there should have been nothing but relief that they were so accepting of Jack. He was somewhat startled to find that was not the case but shoved everything aside for the time being.

Sunny led the charge once more, and if Ratchet were not so thrown off by this conversation his spark would have overflown with happiness at witnessing this. “Because he spent the night in your room. And the only grown mechs that share rooms are sparkmates.”

Well, they were not wrong there. Not at all. So Ratchet opted for a shrug, sipping at his cube lightly. “I’ll see if he wants to come over later.” And the way the twins cheered in joy at that really made his spark soar. He could not keep his happiness from bleeding over to his bond with Wheeljack, who immediately was prodding at him questioningly. ‘*The twins want you to join us again later, if you are fine with that. Apparently only sparkmates share a room. They think they are setting us up.*’

He felt overwhelming joy flowing back at him. ‘*Should I start moving my stuff back in?*’ Wheeljack sounded so eager. He wanted this so badly.

‘*Give them a little longer to warm up to the idea, yeah? Maybe leave one or two things here, though. Sound alright?*’ Ratchet felt that was a fair compromise. They could not spring this on the twins all at once. That would be very unfair for the twins.

It was also a little unfair to Jack not to, but Ratchet really was mostly worried about the twins. He could not help it. They were his mechlings. He had to put them first. Always.

. . .

The twins sat in the main living area of Jazz and Prowl’s quarters with Bluestreak, all three shouting and shoving at each other as they played the latest game Wheeljack had given them; it was actually some sort of a fighting game, and the twins absolutely adored it so far. Sideswipe had made an effort to include Sunny whenever he hung out with Bluestreak, and they were actually all getting along. It was a miracle, if you asked any of the older mechs.

The jet twins had tried their best to stay awake with the older younglings, even after Optimus had retrieved Bumblebee. They had gone with minimal fuss once Jazz had snatched them both up off the couch, leaving Prowl with the other three. None of them had even noticed until Sunny and Sides caught a faint singing from the other room. They both paused at the same moment, heads tilting to the side in confusion. They dialed up their audio receptors as much as they could.

Jazz was singing the younger twins a lullaby.

Sunny nearly winced at the pain that washed over his spark, scowling externally to mask it. Was that what a creator was meant to do with their sparklings? Is that how they should have been put to bed, instead of with death threats and promises of more poking and prodding in the coming? His spark felt heavy and bitter, jaw grinding as he forced back tears. They were better off without all of that. Doting and coddling like that would have only made them weak. They would have never lived, never made it here. All of that torment from before was worth it, because they were happy now. They were safe now. So what, they never had a creator sing them lullabies?

They did not need them.

“What did Jazz do before the war?” Sides asked softly, pulling Sunny from his moping to stare his twin down. The red twin just sent a wave of warmth over their bond, trying to relax his obviously agitated twin. He was curious. Sunny knew that. Sideswipe was always curious. It was going to get them killed one day.

Prowl actually chuckled some, which startled the twins some. “Jazz? He was an enforcer, much like myself. Although, Optimus tells me that Jazz was always fond of doing karaoke and performing. A shame, really, that he never got to share his music with the world.” Prowl’s optics drifted towards the jet twins’ room, expression oddly soft for the generally stoic mech. “Perhaps one day.”

The twins blinked, heads tilting some together. “Why was he an enforcer, then?” Sunny asked, not able to wrap his mind around doing one thing when he enjoyed something else more. That seemed dumb to him, and he could tell Sides was thinking the same thing.

Prowl’s sigh had the twins worried, but Bluestreak did not seem concerned. It could not be that bad if the biggest scaredy mech they knew was not worried. “It appears it is time for a history lesson. Were you taught much before coming here?”

Sunny snorted at that, rolling his crimson optics. “Is that a serious question?” Sides elbowed him gently at his sarcastic tone, but Prowl took no offense to it; he was right in assuming he already had a good understanding for their lack of historical knowledge.

With a sigh, the Praxian settled some more into his seat andd let his doorwings ease some. He heard Jazz slip back into the room, grinning when his sparkmate settled beside him. “Well, allow me to start at the

very beginning then, with Primus and Unicron…”

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

> I am sorry for the wait. Life got a bit out of hand. I'll have the next chapter up in two weeks.

Sideswipe was startled awake by three consecutive weights falling onto his chest, jolting up and immensely glad the three sparklings had leaped on him instead of Sunstreaker as his own battle computer tried to whir to life. He blinked at the three giggling mechlings, still trying to get all his systems functioning at full capacity again. Bee crawled off of him and over to Sunny, pressing into the crook of the other's neck as they all chirped in unison, "Happy spark orn!"

Oh.

The youngest of the twins looked around, completely confused as he heard Ratchet chuckle from the doorway to their room. The medic stood there with a smug grin on his face, arms crossed over his chest. Sunny grumbled something off to his side as Jetfire and Jetstorm joined Bee in cuddling the grumpier of the two twins awake, and Sides took that moment to slip out of the berth. *Spark orn?* How had they known? Ratchet must have figured it out, somehow, because neither of the twins had ever mentioned it. It was not exactly something they took great joy in since their lives had been living Pit up until recently.

He shuffled over to the medic, unsurprised to be pulled into a tight hug. "Happy spark orn, Sideswipe. You, too, Sunstreaker!" Ratchet only got a huff in response, the other obviously doing his best to ignore the giggling sparkling trio as he tried to go back to recharge. "The munchkins insisted on waking you two up. Sorry."

Sides could tell by the smirk on the medic's face that he most definitely was not sorry, but he did not voice this. He was much too busy trying to wrap his processor around mechs being excited for their spark orn, for actually trying to make some sort of a deal out of it. Never before had anyone ever wished them a happy spark orn. Hell, they had stopped saying it to each other when they were only ten vorns old, and he supposed that was sad to really think back on. He leaned into their caretaker's hug, ignoring the emotions welling up in his spark. He would not cry. He would not.

Ratchet's engine purred soothingly, one hand rubbing Sideswipe's

back gently as his field meshed easily with Sides and tried to push comfort, warmth, and *love* at him. “Whoa now, mechling. No reason to go crying.” Ratchet whispered, obviously trying to keep his voice down so the sparklings would not hear and swarm Sideswipe. That was the last thing he wanted, really. He hated getting so emotional in front of anyone, but especially Bee and the Flier twins. They always seemed so sad to see him cry.

‘*I don’t know what to do.*’ Sunny whispered over their bond, feeling just as unsure and saddened. It was a hopeful sort of sad. A sad that was not a wish for the end, but rather sad that they once had wished for an end. They would have missed this; the sparklings cuddling up to Sunny as he started to cry silently and Ratchet holding Sides as he did the same.

Sides pushed back with all of the overwhelming amounts of love he felt from Ratchet, as well as some of his own. ‘*I don’t think we need to do anything, Sunny.*’

Ratchet gave them a few moments to collect themselves and the sparklings before ushering them out to the main room for energon and presents. “These ones are just from me. Everyone else wanted to have a bigger party later.” Ratchet explained, passing two presents to each of the younglings. They stared at them in awe, barely grasping what Ratchet was saying. “They couldn’t help themselves. They do this every vorn for the others, so felt like they had to for you both, too. I can cancel it all, if you guys aren’t comfortable with it.”

Sunny’s little hands shook as he held the presents, anxiety coming off of him in waves. Sides set his own gifts aside briefly to scoot his chair closer to Sunny’s. Softly, they answered together, “No bot has ever done anything for our spark orn.”

Not that any of the Autobots had legitimately expected Shockwave to, or any of the other Decepticons for that matter. Well, perhaps some of Soundwave’s cassettes would, but that guess only came from the testimony of Blaster’s own; they were naturally more family-oriented given their own bonding similar to that of the twins. But, for some reason, Ratchet did not imagine that Ravage, Frenzy, and crew were good company, even on their best behavior. This was why they had planned a party for later in the orn, which the twins were somehow still out of the loop about prior to Ratchet telling him. How they had managed that, Ratchet would never know. Especially with Blurr involved in the planning. He just had to keep these five occupied until Wheeljack gave him the all clear. Which really was not a difficult task,

given how easily Bee and the Jet twins could hold Sides and Sunny's attention.

"Better late than never," Ratchet told them both, offering a gentle smile. "Open them. Go on." He urged, ready to set the memory aside to share with Wheeljack later. Jack had helped with these presents, after all.

Sunny spoke up alone this time, setting the gift into his lap. "What about Wheeljack? Should we wait for him?" That had Sides nodding quickly next to him. They were going to tear Ratchet's spark out at this rate with the Wheeljack stuff. "He'd want to be here."

They were certainly not wrong. Ratchet's spark throbbed almost painfully in his chest at the twins' obvious attachment to the other already. He really had worried for nothing, hadn't he? It seemed so. He pulled in a deep vent, trying to wrap his processor around what to do next. It was giving him nothing, though. So, he trusted spark, and just shrugged. "We can wait until the party if you both want." That got him two happy nods. So it was settled.

Now he just had to make sure that the five younglings did not tear up his quarters while waiting. Easier said than done. At least Blue had gone to help instead of hanging out with them.

. . .

"Happy spark orn!" The shout was in unison, somehow. Ratchet will never know how they managed that. He could not be bothered to dwell on it either, not with two excited younglings sprinting by him into the horde of bots. The medic hung back, allowing the sparklings to toddle quickly away after setting them all down. He never really had been one for large social gatherings; this was the first party the Autobots had thrown since he joined them that he had actually attended.

He was nearly startled by Wheeljack coming up behind him, the other setting a single hand on his shoulder strut before speaking. "Did they like the games?"

Ratchet shrugged, rolling his optics affectionately. "They wanted to wait for you before opening them, so I still have them." He pulled them both from his subspace. Their bond was overflowing with love and joy. Primus, Wheeljack really did love those two younglings as if they were his own. It hurt Ratchet to think about. If Wheeljack were with any other mech, perhaps he could have mechlings of his own.

Instead, he stuck himself with old Ratchet. Wheeljack deserved better.

A hand ghosted over his faceplate, settling on a cheek and snapping him from his moping. “There is no one better for me than you, Ratchet. You know that.” There was so much sincerity in the whisper. So much love. Wheeljack was always so full of love. It was not the time for that, however. Ratchet took a quick step away from the other, pulling his field in and hoping the mechlings did not see. He loved ‘Jack, but the twins did not know yet. He did not want to potentially ruin their spark orn with this.

Ratchet never had been the best at shutting Wheeljack out. He saw the instant that last thought bled over their bond and instantly regretted it. Wheeljack stormed out of the room, Ratchet hot on his heels. He snatched his hand in his, begging him to stop. “’Jack, c'mon-“

Ever gentle Wheeljack actually smacked Ratchet's hand away, startling the older mech. There was fire in the scientist's optics, a rage that did not belong there. “Don’t. Don't you dare. I-I can't keep pretending, Ratchet. This- this is not *fair*.”

“’Jack, please.” Ratchet begged, still trying to keep his voice down. “I didn’t mean it the way you are thinking. You have to know that. Please.” He did not know how he was supposed to convince the other. How he could properly apologize. He just had to get him to listen, hopefully. “I love you. The twins love you. You *know* I didn’t mean it like that.”

Wheeljack just shook his helm, storming off. Frag it all. What was Ratchet supposed to do? He had two younglings in there he wanted to enjoy their spark orn. And a sparkmate who thought he hated him now. What had he gotten himself into?

. . .

Ratchet had thought the twins were fast asleep in their room after all of the chaos and fun of their first spark orn with the Autobots. Especially after Wheeljack had returned and spent the entire time playing with the twins and ignoring Ratchet entirely. Because of this, he was surprised when the couch settled some next to him, snapping his attention from his moping to look at Sunstreaker. Something was wrong. The yellow twin had pulled his knees tightly to his chest, arms wrapped around and holding them there as if letting go would mean he would fall apart. His optics stayed focused straight ahead, field pulled so tight to him that Ratchet barely felt it as he reached

tentatively out with his own.

“Bad dream, Sunshine?” He asked softly, reaching out and startling when Sunstreaker abruptly scooted away from him. The youngling nearly fell off of the couch he moved so quickly, looking frightened up at Ratchet. Ratchet just barely caught the tremble of Sunstreaker's chin before he was all out sobbing into his knees, forcing his helm between them as if to try and force everything out. Ratchet reached for him again, settling a hand on him and was saddened when Sunny shook him off.

The youngling finally bit out, “D-don’t touch me!” It did not sound angry, though; Ratchet had heard Sunstreaker's angry tone of voice plenty by then. “I-I don't want to ruin y-you, t-t-too.”

Oh no.

“I-I hurt him.” Sunstreaker whispered, shrinking in on himself even further somehow. Ratchet could guess at who *him* was easily enough but opted to let Sunstreaker keep speaking. “I-I didn’t mean it. I never- I never mean it.”

… *What did he mean by never?* Ratchet was sliding off the couch and moving to kneel before Sunny. His hands hovered over the other, wanting to touch but fearing he might startle the other into waking up Sides. “What happened, Sunny?”

A choked sob left the tiny yellow youngling, “I l-lost control. I-it was gonna hurt him. *I was gonna hurt Sides.*” Crimson optics overflowed with tears, looking up at Ratchet with his chin quivering. “I-I don’t wanna hurt Sides. Never again.”

This really was not turning out to be a good orn for Ratchet, it seemed. He had worried about battle protocols with both twins, although Sideswipe had not shown any significant signs to worry him. Sunny had not yet either. Maybe the split-off protocols were smarter than he had anticipated. If they were manifesting themselves externally like this, though, it could very well be too late to safely remove them. There was nothing the medic could really do at the moment other than finally pull Sunny against his chestplate and just let the mechling cry. He could have Smokescreen talk with the twins in a couple of orns, see if some sort of therapy helped. For now, he just held the youngling and did his best to calm him. “It’s alright, Sunny. You’re fine. Sides is fine. Everything is gonna be alright.”

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

> I did it! Hopefully I can get the next couple of chapters up in the next couple of weeks. I have both of them mostly written, but I just want to go through and flesh out some of the details a little better in some parts. The next few chapters will have a slower pace and fewer time jumps (finally), and I want to make sure I don't miss anything important lol

“There’s not a lot else we can do except find what triggers it and help them with that.” Smokescreen said, much to Ratchet and the Twins’ displeasure. Ratchet had taken them to him early in the orn to discuss his concerns with the battle protocols. Seemed they did not have many options. “I honestly advise having Jazz go in to help remove them. Other than yourself, Ratchet, there is no one better suited for the job. They are young enough. It may not be too late.”

Ratchet shook his helm. The twins were not saying anything, but with how tightly both of their fields were pulled to their frames, they did not need to. “I don’t think either of them really wants someone digging around in their processor. Can’t say I blame them, really.” He stood from his chair, motioning for the twins to rise as well. “Comm me when you are available? The twins have nothing concrete in their schedules every orn, so long as they get their coursework done.”

Smokescreen nods, offering the three mechs a small smile. “Of course. Have a good rest of your orn.”

Ratchet led them back out and towards the rec room, the twins following him silently. It was obvious to the medic they were discussing something privately, however; their hands were moving as if they were talking out loud. It was a funny quirk that many of the Autobots had noticed when they first started to leave Ratchet’s side and explore the base. The medic stopped, rolling his optics when both younglings crash right into him. “Care to share your thoughts?”

Both twins looked a tad embarrassed, Sides more than Sunny. “Would it hurt? To have them removed?” Sides asked. “Sunny wants them gone, but neither of us want to get hurt because of it. What if… what if we’re no longer *us* when they’re gone?”

Ratchet knelt down, putting a hand on each of their shoulder struts.

“We’ll try figuring out ways to keep them suppressed first. Removing split off protocols is a very difficult thing, and often does not go as planned. We’re going to avoid that for now, okay?” That got him two nods in response. The twins seemed a little more at ease now, following him to the rec room where they split off from him so Ratchet could go to a battle planning meeting.

It was going to be a long orn.

. . .

The twins were surprised to find that Ratchet was the mech staying behind with the mechlings and the base when the other Autobots were marching off to battle. The medic usually went with and Alpha Trion would stay behind but he had instead volunteered to stay back as well with the six younglings and sparklings on base. “The twins are trouble,” Ratchet had offered up when asked why he was staying behind. No one knew which set of twins he was talking about. They all supposed it could apply to both. Perhaps it did.

The mechlings were all playing around in the medbay when a very defeated looking Jazz found them. The older twins were immediately on high alert as the little fliers swarmed their devastated looking sire. They chirped and whirred happily at him, and he simply grabbed them and held them close. Prowl walked into the medbay behind him, taking their creations in his arms and whispering to them as he slipped out again. Bluestreak silently followed his brother after a moment, faceplate suddenly scrunched up in concern. Jazz remained; he was just standing there with his shoulders slumped. He was covered in all sorts of dents and dings that had the twins on high alert.

Something was very, *very* wrong.

Bee was catching on to it as well, antennae and doorwings drooping down. He leaned further into Sunstreaker, whirring hesitantly at Jazz. The TIC finally sighed, kneeling down before where the three sat on the floor. “Bee… you’re gonna stay with me and Prowler for a little while.” He whispered, reaching for the sparkling.

“Why?” Hearing Bee’s sad little question sent a jolt of sadness through the twins’ sparks. *Optimus was not coming back.* Bee grabbed tightly to Sunny’s arm, “Where Oppy? Want Oppy.”

“We… uh, we lost him. The bad mechs took him.” Jazz said, not able to look at the little yellow sparkling as he completely slumped.

Sunny rubbed tiny circles between the little doorwings on Bee's back, engine purring softly to try and soothe the mechling as he felt him start to shudder softly. "G-gonna get 'im back?"

The normally so chipper mech just shook his helm, pulling in a soft sigh. "I… I'm not so sure, Bee." It was distressing to see Jazz, so scuffed up and hopeless.

'*No more Prime?*' Sunny asked over their bond, squeezing Bee gently. He spoke aloud to Jazz, "W-we'll come sit with Bee and the Twins for a bit." He could only imagine how lost the poor mechling felt. The Twins had never felt it themselves; there was some anxiety when Shockwave severed their bond. That had been quickly snuffed out during his experiments, however.

Sides followed Jazz with him, staying close to his side and meshing his field with Bee's. '*I can't believe it. Not Prime. What… what are the Autobots gonna do without him?*' The mech was essentially the very center of the Autobot movement; without him, the group would not exist. He was also one of the kindest mechs that the twins had ever met. He did not deserve to rot to death in a Decepticon prison cell.

The twins got settled into the room with Bee and the younger twins, watching a dejected Jazz leave them to find Prowl and Bluestreak. Sunny waited until all was quiet and he knew Jazz was far enough away before ramming his fist into the wall with a shout. "Frag it all! This shouldn't be happening!" He brushed Sides off when he moved to attempt to console his twin and check out his fist, opting to instead pace the length of the room. "What are *we* supposed to do?

"Know find Oppy. Me know." Bee insisted, catching their attention with his little expression startlingly serious for such a small mech. If Sunny and Sides did not know the gravity of the situation, they might laugh. "Me feel 'im. Can find."

Feel him? The twins thought together, looking to each other quickly. They knew there was only one way that was possible, although they had only known the feeling for a short period of time before Shockwave had ripped it away from them. It was a thing only young sparklings and their creators were capable of – well, and twins. Tracking someone with a bond was nearly impossible otherwise. But, if Bee could track him down…

They could save the Prime. They had to.

Sunny groaned, looking to Sides with a glare. '*They are gonna kill us.*'

“Well, hopefully they’ll be able to. Cause this could kill us.” Sides responded aloud, snagging Bee up and setting the sparkling on one of his shoulders. They had to sneak off the ship without Red Alert spotting them, which was next to impossible. Then they would have to make their way to whatever Decepticon base they had Optimus stashed away at. It was not going to be easy to pull off.

With a shrug, Sunny went over to the vent in the Jet Twins room, carefully taking off the cover and showing the younger twins how to put it back. “You two have to cover for us, alright? Prowl can’t know we’re gone, or Ratchet, got it?”

“No come?” Jetfire asked softly, his twin sitting silently at his side. “Don’t want to lie to carrier.”

Sides just shrugs, moving to hoist Bee up into the vents as Sunny handed the younger twins the screwdriver he had used. “You don’t have to. Just say we took Bee somewhere with us. You don’t know where.”

Jetstorm scowled. “Me no like.”

“Ya don’t have to.” Sunny grumbled, helping Side climb into the vent first before letting his twin haul him up. He pulled the vent cover into place for the twins to screw it on when they were gone. “Just say it and make it believable. Problem solved.” The older twins did not wait for them to start screwing the cover back on before taking Bee and moving further into the vents. They had to be quick, if they wanted to be sure they could save Optimus and get passed Red Alert’s cameras before he shut the entire base down to keep them in.

. . .

“You mechs wanna tell me where you’re headed.”

The twins nearly jumped out of their plating, both whipping around with daggers at the ready. They had miraculously made it out of the base and were slowly picking their way through Iacon with Bee telling them if they were “hot or cold”. Sideswipe held Bee with one hand to his chest, letting his brother take a step in front of him. They lowered their weapons and helms a bit, though, when Bee chirped happily, reaching for one of the many mechs they had been trying to avoid. Jazz had his hands on his hips, looking actually mad at them. It was startling to see. Jazz had never even been mad at them when they had pulled pranks on him. To be fair, they had never decided to sneak off base with a sparkling.

“Find Oppy!” Bee cheered as both twins quickly looked away from the older mech. “We save!”

There was a terrifying level of rage in Jazz’s voice when he spoke next. “You *what*? Have ya both got fraggin’ bolts for processors? That’s a suicide mission!” His yelling was met by silence. He sighed, moving towards them now to take Bee.

“It won’t be a suicide mission.” Sunny answered, looking up to meet Jazz’s blue optics with his own red. “We can fight. We’re really good at it. Better than half the Autobots, I bet. We can get Optimus out.”

Jazz shook his helm. These mechlings were out of their processors. Ratchet would murder him if he let them go. He was amazed they got around Prowl, Ratchet, and Red Alert. “Ya think you’re gonna be able to fight off ‘Cons, keep Bee safe, and haul Optimus out?”

“Uh, yeah.” Sides said with a little shrug. “We were trained to pull off crazy slag like this.”

“And neither of you have trained since you came to the bots,” Jazz countered. “Ratchet will kill me if I let this happen, if the ‘Cons don't first.”

Ratchet would kill them, too. But how could they live with themselves if they let Bee lose his caretaker – or, rather, his carrier? They knew the pain of that bond breaking; they wished it on no one. “We have to do this.” Sunstreaker said firmly, Sides nodding beside him. “And we'll fight you, too, if we have to.”

Jazz watched them carefully, could feel the anxiety in their barely controlled fields. It was a stark contrast between that and the determination on their faceplates. He almost wondered how two younglings became so brave and stubborn, but they had always been that way. At least as long as they had been with the Autobots, if not longer. And he had seen them in combat, unfortunately. He knew they could handle themselves, with a little help. They would not beat him but Ratchet surely would if he fought the medic’s younglings.

He threw his helm back with a groan, walking forward and taking Bee from Sideswipe. “You two get to explain this to Ratchet.” He grumbled, placing Bee on his shoulder. “Let's go. If we're lucky, OP will be too injured to chew me out for using his sparkling to track him down.”

The twins exchanged a quick grin before following after Jazz, keeping

their daggers at the ready as they drew closer to Iacon's border. While not near enemy territory, they chattered back and forth with Jazz; the mech was super easy to get along with. He had so many fun stories to share, and by far their favorites were ones from before the war, trying to get Optimus and Prowl drunk. Neither of them could see that happening now, and the images their processors conjured up for it had them nearly collapsing in laughter. Jazz shushed them lightly, "Easy, mechlin's. We're on a mission."

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

Some of y'all have such little faith in Jazz, lol.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The twins figured out where they were headed before Jazz did, if only because it was the last place they wanted to be. Suddenly, they were not so excited to be getting out and saving the day. Jazz watched them go from trying to lead the way to shrinking back behind him, optics snapping to any sort of sound nearby. As saddening as it was to see, though, it would hopefully make his job easier if the twins just let him go in and get Optimus himself. They wanted nothing to do with their carrier, after all.

Which was why he was surprised when he found a place for the twins and Bee to hide, and the twins decided to protest. “You can’t just leave us here!” Sides argued, taking Bee as Jazz passed him over to him. “You’ll get caught in there, too! You won’t make it out!”

Jazz shook his helm, pointing at the twins and levelling them with a glare. “Ya both *have* to stay here with Bee. I can’t bring him in there. Optimus will kill me. And neither of you is in any shape to go in there.” Sunny started to protest, taking a couple steps forward. “Uh-uh, no. There is no arguing about this. I *cannot* do my job with you three in there. We’ll all get killed. Stay here. Keep Bee safe. I’ll bring Optimus back in no time.”

“And if you don’t make it out?” Sunny asked, tone rough. Jazz eyed the youngling, unable to get a good read on him with his field pulled as tightly to his frame as possible. Sides was always easy to read. Sunny… Sunny was something else, to everyone but Sides and Ratchet. He had assumed the older twin would just stay back and mope until Jazz came back. Wasn’t the first time he was wrong.

Jazz opted to wink at Sunny, hoping to soothe some of the youngling’s anxiety. “I’ve never failed a stealth mission yet, mechlin’. Even when I got stuck draggin’ Ironhide around. I think Optimus and I’ve got this. Wait. Here. Ya both have to keep li’l Bee safe, alright?”

Sunny gave an exasperated sigh, “How long before we go in to save your aft?!” He snapped, crossing his arms over his chestplate.

Ratchet was hearing about the mouth on this one later.

“You don’t.” Jazz hoped his firm tone left no room for arguing; Prowl was more the disciplinarian than he was. “If I don’t come back, you get back to Iacon. You *do not* come after me under any circumstances. Got me?” The twins looked away from him, both scowling. Jazz stepped back towards them, growing annoyed with this. “No, I need to know from both of you that you will *stay here*. Tell me you won’t come after me.”

After a long pause, the twins spoke in unison. “We won’t come after you.”

‘We’ll go after Optimus.’

They did wait until they were sure that Jazz was in the base before they got Bee settle as far back into the small cave as they could. The sparkling looked terrified of being left alone but said nothing. He just nodded as Sides spoke to him. “No one is gonna find you here. We’re gonna go keep ‘em busy while Jazz gets Optimus back, okay?”

“Come back?” Bee whispered, looking from Sides to Sunny.

Sides smirked, nodding as he knuckled between the sparkling’s antennae. “Of course.”

. . .

Getting into the base was easier than it was when they had attempted to save Sunny. Sides was actually startled to not hear any explosions going off because of Jazz. He had heard that the mech was the Autobot’s master spy, but he always seemed so… *loud*, for lack of a better word. He expected the mech to go in guns blazing. Maybe he had, and the Decepticons had already captured him, too. Sides hoped that was not the case.

There was little time to think on that, though, as both twins let their battle protocols take over. There were footsteps echoing down the corridor and little time to waste. They needed to provide a sufficient distraction to make sure that Jazz and Optimus could get out. ‘*Time to remind them why they called us the Twin Terrors.*’ Sunny snarked over their bond, blades drawn.

‘*No seekers, though.*’ Sides pointed out when they launched themselves at the mechs rounding the corner. ‘*I was really wanting to practice our jet judo again.*’

“Keep an optic out for Lazerbeak then,” Sunny called, sprinting ahead after cutting the wires at one mech’s ankle. He ignored his twin’s frustrated groan, charging his way down the hall. They had to make as big of a distraction as possible, right?

“I am insulted that you’d think I’d *want* to see that pain in the aft.” Sides called down the hall, sidestepping a shot before launching himself at the mech. Frontliners really were just cannon fodder, weren’t they? These mechs fought like drones. There was no challenge, not even for the younglings. And Jazz had seemed concerned.

Sunstreaker scoffed, looking back at his brother. “He doesn’t know us, that’s why.” He almost continued but paused when Sides suddenly froze, complete terror flowing over their bond.

A large hand snatched him up, the other moving to snag Sides. “Oh, but *I* do.”

Sunstreaker began flailing immediately, catching whatever he could with his blades. It was no use. All it got him was a deep chuckle. His battle protocols had snapped off the second that familiar field brushed against his own. Like a scared little mechling. He refused to go quietly, battle protocols be damned, yelling as loudly as he could. If Jazz heard him, they may be saved. The base was massive, though. Jazz would likely never find them.

They were done for.

Shockwave threw them into the depth of a room, likely one of his many torture chambers, shutting the door behind him. “Your sire is very disappointed in you, mechlings,” Shockwave practically hissed, skulking around the edge of the room. They stood pressed tightly together, trembling like small sparklings once more. “You both have been very bad. If you come back willingly, perhaps he won't want you both reformatted.”

“N-never!” Sunstreaker bit out, trying to stand firm even though the tremble of his voice gave him away. They were never going back. Over his dead body. He knew Sideswipe could never do it, would not be able to do that to save them both from this hell. Sunstreaker would kill himself in a sparkbeat, though. And take his twin with him, if it kept them from Shockwave's claws. They were *never* going back. He would make sure of it.

Sunstreaker could practically hear Shockwave's smug smirk, if the

mech could actually pull one off. “Oh, but you are already here. And you are going nowhere, mechlings. Let the Prime escape; I have his future killers back in my hands.” *Prime's killers?* The twins were filled with sudden dread, not being able to even imagine killing Optimus. The mech was a true gentle giant and probably the bravest mech they knew. Not only that, but it would completely devastate Bumblebee. They could never do that to the mechling they considered to be a younger brother. “Your sire could never pull it off; that is why I had you two. I cannot best the Prime in combat, but two berserker profiles on the mechlings of… well, that would be telling too much now, wouldn't it?

“The fact stands, though: that is all you were ever created for. *Killing*. It is in your very sparks, your CNA. Try as you might, you will not be able to escape it.” Shockwave stood before the door now, blocking their escape and looming too close for Sides' tastes.

And as much as he could feel his twin denying what Shockwave said over their bond, Sunny knew. He had always known, no matter how much Sides or Ratchet had tried to convince him otherwise. He knew it the very moment he came to after trying to pry his twin's helm off. He was a monster. He did not need Shockwave of all mech's to remind him of this. He had to deal with the constant reminder of the scars on Sides' arms or how sometimes he would still get phantom pains in his neck. They were not normal, never had been. No matter how much Sideswipe pretended otherwise, Shockwave would always be right.

That did not mean he would ever go back to Shockwave. He would fight that urge as long as he could. He would be good, at least until he physically could not anymore. Just because there was evil in them, in *him*, did not mean there was no good left either. Bumblebee had shown Sunny again that he could be gentle. He had shown them both that. And right then, Bumblebee was *just outside the base,* while Jazz was getting Optimus. He was in danger if they did not make it out of here, and both the twins knew it. They had to keep Shockwave *there*. No matter what.

Sunstreaker launched himself at the towering, one-opticed mech, growling in rage. Sideswipe was not far behind him, both with blades drawn. They would not go peacefully. Shockwave was right; he had them. There was no way out, not without some divine – or saboteur – intervention. They would damage him as much as possible before whatever fate befell them, though.

They just regretted not being able to say bye to Ratchet properly, as

they dipped and dashed around Shockwave. With each time their blades were able to connect with the mech, they listed a time to each other that Ratchet had been a better surrogate carrier than Shockwave could have ever dreamt of being. They thought back to every single time one of them had a night terror, and Ratchet had simply held them both. Or how Ratchet just patched them both up without question whenever they got injured rough-housing. Sunny thought of how Ratchet had never pressured him to change his optics like Sides had; it would always be his choice if he did it. The medic loved them no matter what, and he had only known them for such a brief time. They had stumbled into his life by pure chance, but at least because of that they could both die having felt the love of an actual creator.

A clawed hand snatched Sunstreaker up by a leg suddenly, snagging him into the air so quickly his helm snapped back and his vision white out briefly. He heard Sides cry out but could feel him frozen even while his vision reset itself. It was like before, almost. Different appendage, but similar enough situation. *'Don't let him take us again!'* Sunny practically screamed over their bond. *'Sides, please, don't!'*

'I-I can't.' Sides stuttered back, and as Sunny could finally see his twin again, he saw the pure terror in his eyes. He just stood there shaking. Sweet, bubbly Sideswipe was not meant to be a shaking mess. He was meant to be laughing and joking and running from Prowl after another dumb prank or singing to Bee and the Jet Twins or anything but what he was doing just then.

Sunny had dropped his blade when he was snatched from the ground, so it appeared he would have to improvise. He swung a hand up, digging his fingers into the cabling in Shockwave's wrist and *pulling*. The large mech howled in pain, flinging Sunstreaker across the room and into the far wall. Sunny screamed as he collided with the wall, feeling his leg strut snap clean in half. Sides was at his side in an instant, hovering over his twin and looking absolutely terrified.

Hand reached to Sunny, unsure. “W-what do I do?” Sideswipe muttered, looking desperate. “W-what-"

Sunstreaker had no time to try and speak through the pain or snag Sideswipe's dagger before the world seemed to explode around them. Jazz and Optimus came bursting into the room, guns blazing. If Sunstreaker were not already crying, he definitely would have been then. The smaller of the two mechs was snatching him up, angrily yelling at both the twins as Optimus distracted Shockwave. Sunstreaker did not care, though. He just sobbed, careful not to try

and move. Everything hurt, but he was so *happy* to see the saboteur. He found he did not *want* to die. Not really.

They managed to escape the base, making it to where Bumblebee had stayed hidden. The sparkling squealed in joy when he saw Optimus, flinging himself at the mech and gladly being held close. They all stayed slumped in the cave for a moment, Jazz settling Sunny onto the ground to rest his arms some. “Y’all are the worst.” Jazz grumbled, shaking his helm. “I *had* it, ya brats.”

Sunny just chuckled, optics shuttering briefly. “Sure ya did.” He was in stasis moments later, pain and anxiety finally having overwhelmed him enough to put him to sleep. Jazz looked worriedly to Sides, knowing that if something were really wrong the other twin would know in an instant. Sides did not look startled or distressed at all, simply shrugging. “If he goes, I go,” The red twin said with a shrug.

“Yeah, well now the old Hatchet is definitely gonna kill me, thanks.” Jazz grumbled, moving to help Sides while Optimus picked up Sunny and Bee. “I should’ve sent ya both back to base.”

. . .

Ratchet had been going crazy tearing the base apart while trying to locate the twins. When he had gotten back to his quarters and not found them, he had not thought much of it at first. He figured they were with Bee in Prowl and Jazz’s quarters. Then they were not. Neither was Bumblebee. Prowl’s twins were oddly silent, just cuddled up and staring up at them as innocently as the two little troublemakers could manage. The second Ratchet turned to ask them what they knew, Prowl *growled* at him and ushered the medic out of their quarters. “They’re likely just around the base somewhere, trying to distract Bee.” The tactician had suggested.

Ratchet had rampaged throughout the whole ship, interrogating every mech he came across, when Jazz and Optimus rounded a corner. Each had a twin in their grasp, with Bee also in Optimus’ hold on Sunstreaker’s chestplate. Jazz froze the second Ratchet’s optics fell on them, offering a sheepish grin as a limping Sideswipe waved from his side. Optimus at least had the decency to hang his helm with some sense of shame. Ratchet did not even consider the fact that Optimus was supposed to be a Decepticon prisoner. The medic was charging at them in an instant, not saying a word as he snagged the golden youngling, passing Bee off to Optimus and turning to snap at them to follow him. He grumbled under his breath as he marched off to the

medbay, complaining about dumb younglings and overgrown mechlings.

Sunstreaker must have awoken to Ratchet's muttering, and he startled the medic when he spoke softly. "We got back the Prime. No good job?" There was a hint of jest in the other's tone, though, that Ratchet would have generally expected from Sideswipe.

"You could've died." He felt he had every right to be snappish with the twins, as well as Jazz for thinking it was a bright idea to *take them on a rescue mission at forty vorns old*. His spark thudded anxiously in his chest at the thought of going back to his quarters every night to complete silence instead of the sounds of bickering as the twin terrors played holo games together well passed their bedtime. He held Sunny just a bit tighter when he imagined never again having to bail Sides out of trouble for pulling a prank, or deal with Sunny after the other started another fight. There would be no younglings surprising him in his medbay with injuries they swore were not from sparring they were not even allowed to do. His life would be so much duller without them, and he could not go back to that.

Without the twins, the list of things he had to live for was almost completely empty. They were the only thing outside of the cause, really. They had given him purpose again, in a way none of the other mechlings amongst them had. Because they were his.

He did not want to do it alone anymore.

He did his best to bury his own worry as they silently entered the medbay. He motioned Optimus to one of the larger berths, moving and setting Sunny on a berth that might as well have had the other's designation on it with how often he wound up there. As Jazz helped Sides to the one across from it, Ratchet whispered, "What am I going to do with you two?"

"Fix us and then yell at us for a bit, maybe hit us with a wrench?" Sides joked from behind him, earning a sharp glare.

A hand on Ratchet's own startled him, pulling his attention back to Sunstreaker. The youngling's expression was soft for once, hand squeezing gently over Ratchet's. "We're not going anywhere, Ratchet." He assured softly.

Sideswipe snorted behind them. "That's 'cause you snapped your leg strut, Sunny."

Ratchet nearly whacked the youngling silly at that, stopping only when Optimus spoke before he could begin his tirade. The larger mech had his tiny sparkling cradled close to his spark, Bee having somehow fallen asleep; likely due to all of the recent excitement. “If I were more careful, they never would have come after me, and not been hurt doing so. I am sorry, Ratchet.”

Optimus ducked the wrench that came sailing at him just in time, still looking extremely apologetic. “I deserve that. If anything serious had happened with them, more so than what did… I would not be able to forgive myself for an old friend’s younglings dying because of my mistakes.” The Prime cast a look to Jazz as well, although Ratchet was unsure if that was some sort of promise or the other trying to get Jazz to apologize as well. Perhaps both, although Ratchet paid them no more attention as he set to work at getting Sunny’s leg set and splinted so his self-repair could do the rest.

“I mean, we only went in ‘cause we thought Jazz was gonna get experimented on.” Sides piped up from behind Ratchet, sending Ratchet’s rage higher as Sunny just kind of shrugged sheepishly up at him in agreement. “The Autobots can’t lose Prime and Jazz.”

Sunny tacked on quickly before his twin could continue, “We also are pretty solid fighters, Hatchet. We can more than handle ourselves.”

That was obviously not the case, not with their injuries and the pure exhaustion and anxiety coming off both of them in waves. Something had happened, likely whatever had caused Sunstreaker’s leg strut to snap, that had rattled the twins; it was obvious with how close to their armor they held their fields. He would be willing to bet it had something to do with Shockwave, but he had no way to prove it without them telling him so. And good luck to any mech that thought he could get the twins to open up any more than they were willing. No, Ratchet was more than willing to wait until the twin terrors inevitably opened up to him, as they always did.

He let out a sad sigh, pulling them both into a hug suddenly while being careful of Sunny’s leg. “*I* can’t lose *you*.”

Sunny patted Ratchet's arm awkwardly, not nestling into the hug as instantly as Sideswipe. "I'm sorry." He muttered, Sideswipe nodding against Ratchet in agreement.

Ratchet had some apologizing of his own to do. That could wait until after he got the Twins taken care of. Wheeljack could wait just a little

bit longer.

Chapter End Notes

> Yeah, I am not an action writer. Sorry. Either way, the next chapter should be up in a couple of weeks at most. Depends on how swamped I get at work.

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

> This one is short cause the ending was kinda awkward. Next one will be up next week, whenever I finish editing it.

“Sides, Sunny, this is Wheeljack.” Ratchet said, motioning to the scientist who stood there almost awkwardly. The twins looked to each other, each with an optic ridge raised.

“We know who Wheeljack is, Ratch.” Sides pointed out, leaning forward some. “You okay, old mech?” He joked some, getting a slight shove from Sunny that did nothing to stop his laughter.

Ratchet just kept his optics on them as he slowly spoke once more. “Wheeljack is my sparkmate.”

That got him two very wide sets of optics, looking from him, to Wheeljack, and then to each other. The twins were obviously talking over their bond with each other, if the just barely noticeable hand gestures were anything to go by; they never quite figured out how to resist that urge. His rambunctious, animated children. *Theirs*, if the twins would accept Wheeljack. He had hidden the truth from them initially out of concern that the scientist would be a tad too high-strung for two younglings raised in the rings. Wheeljack had been understanding, until a few decaorns turned into dozens and then nearly a vorn. And then Ratchet had thought he had lost the twins; and in losing the twins, deprived Wheeljack of the chance to experience what he had for a while by that time. So, with a lot of groveling for forgiveness and a good bit of help distracting the twins as they moved Wheeljack back into *their* quarters, Wheeljack was back in his life as he should have been for far too long.

“Sparkmate?” Sideswipe asked cautiously, the first to speak as always. Sideswipe was the talker, Sunstreaker was the one who acted. “Since when?” There was fear and confusion in that, as if Sideswipe could not fathom why Ratchet would hide this from them. The sad look in Sunstreaker's optics made it obvious that he thought it was *because* of them, not *for* them.

Ratchet had the decency to at least sound a little ashamed, “Since before the war.”

Wheeljack stepped forward, kneeling down before where both younglings were sat in the main living area of their quarter. Sunstreaker looked ready to bolt, if he were physically able to; his leg was still healing. It would be for a few more decaorns likely. “Lemme just tell you… this was *all* Ratchet’s idea.” The medic was ready to strangle his sparkmate at that, except suddenly the two younglings were grinning shyly again. “He thought you would be *scared* of me. Me! Absolutely insane, amiright?”

Sunny and Sides both laughed softly, Sunny nodding. “Definitely insane.” Sideswipe answered, easing the heavy weight on Ratchet’s spark some. “Does this mean we can see you all the time now?”

“You could see me all the time before!” There was a playful edge to the scientist’s exasperated tone that had Ratchet moving to kneel beside him.

“But now you’ll be *here* all the time? Like when we go to berth? And get up?” Sunny asked, voicing the real question.

Wheeljack’s expression made Ratchet's spark skip a beat. “There’s nowhere else I’d rather be.”

. . .

Wheeljack's stuff was moved into their quarters before the twins even knew what was going on, filling it in a way that no one had not thought Sunstreaker would actually enjoy. It became impossibly cluttered between Wheeljack's projects and Sunny's drawings. It was driving Ratchet crazy, but the old medic never did more than grumble under his breath about it. Not when he would catch the usually reserved yellow youngling just beaming at everything around him. He was absolutely elated, and Ratchet could not find it in himself to crush that happiness. Especially when he so rarely saw Sunny smile as it was. Sunny seemed completely relaxed, sitting on the floor of the main living area with a game actually trying to get everyone to play instead of Sideswipe for once. There were even paint smudges on his armor he had yet to scrub off. It was almost like this was what Sunny needed; an actual family. Wheeljack had been right all along.

‘*Of course I was,’* Wheeljack teased over their bond, all while moving to sit on the floor with Sunny and Sides. “C’mon, Ratchet. Family game time.” He sounded so happy that it physically hurt Ratchet. The medic saved the scene before him to store on a datapad later before giving a nod. He could not find his voice, not with Wheeljack and the

twins looking so expectantly at him. He settled down next to ‘Jack, the scientist putting a hand on his leg lightly as Sides and Sunny explained the rules of this game.

Vorns ago, Ratchet had not been able to imagine himself with a family. As a senator before the stirrings of war had started, he had not had time to consider romancing another mech or femme into settling down with him. Then, when he had started medic training, he had even less time. He was also much too old by then. That never seemed to stop Wheeljack from blowing himself up just to see the medic, of course. Ratchet was forever grateful for just how persistent ‘Jack could be at times.

He was so glad that he had yet to chase Wheeljack away, and that they got to have this little family together.

Putting the twins to berth together became one of his favorite activities. They still had their berths pressed together in the center of the rooms, so Wheeljack and Ratchet would both go to each side to say good night to both Sides and Sunny. Sides was almost always in recharge before they even left the room; the youngling could recharge anywhere and at anytime. Sunstreaker was another story, especially after coming back from saving Prime. He seemed to fight it, even when Ratchet and Wheeljack could both see his red optics flickering as he tried to force himself to stay up. If not for the reason he was doing it, they might think it was cute.

That orn was another one of Sunstreaker forcing himself to stay awake as Sides was already recharging beside him. "Mechlin', you've got to rest." 'Jack insisted softly, sitting on the edge of the berth and resting a hand over one of Sunny's atop their blanket. He was so gentle with them, all of the time.

"I will. Promise." Sunny answered quickly, and Ratchet could just barely make out him squeezing one of 'Jack's digits. "Promise. Just... can I ask you something?" He almost seemed ashamed, his tone soft and small. Nothing at all like the happy, confident mechling he generally was as of late. After a nod from both 'Jack and Ratchet, he continued. "Could... could we change my optic color, too?"

Ah.

Ratchet sat beside 'Jack on the bed, resting a hand over Sunny's legs carefully to avoid aggravating his injury. "I can do it tomorrow, but only if you are sure you want it."

A quick nod. "I... I don't want to- I-"

'Jack gave Sunny a quick kiss on the top of his helm as the youngling clammed up suddenly. "Whatever reason, it doesn't matter. The choice is your's, Sunshine. Just remind me or Ratch in the morning, 'kay?" He got a tiny, tired smile. "Recharge well, Sunshine."

"Love you, Ratch, 'Jack." Sunny mumbled, optics shuttering finally as both mechs stand up. Ratchet's spark thudded happily in his chest at the grin on 'Jack's face.

"Love you, too, Sunshine."

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

> Another short one, but I had to get it out of the way before I decide to stab you all in the gut with some feels again. You've got a couple more chapters, first of which should be up in the next week or so, before the actual plot picks up again.

Sideswipe slipped into Ratchet's office in the medbay, unsurprised to find him there that late in the orn. He often slipped out after the twins were in berth to do a few bits of last minute paperwork. He did his best to ignore the quiver of his hands as Shockwave's words just played in his processor over and over again. *The fact stands, though: that is all you were created for. Killing.* Killing. He was not even fifty vorns old yet, but he already had done so much killing. Was Shockwave right? Was there nothing more to them than death and destruction? And if so, were Ratchet, Bee, or any of the Autobots safe from them?

“Sides?” Ratchet was giving him a concerned look, brow plates furrowed. He reached a hand out to him, waiting for Sides to accept it just like he had from the beginning with either of them. An offer of affection. They could take it or leave it, if they wanted. “Something wrong, mechling?”

Yes. He ignored the hand, rushing forward and pressing himself into the chestplate of the mech that had taken them in without a second thought. He settled instead for just whispering, “Am I evil?”

Ratchet thankfully did not hesitate with his response. “Absolutely not. Why would you ever think this?”

He just sobbed softly, clinging to Ratchet as he played the audio clip through his speaker. “*The fact stands, though: that is all you were created for. Killing.*” Shockwave’s voice never failed to send chills up and down his spine, making him want to curl up in a little ball. He hated how easily he reacted to just the thought of his carrier sometimes. You were not *supposed* to be absolutely terrified of the mech that created you. The mech that was *supposed* to love you and raise you.

Shockwave had apparently missed that memo.

Hearing the clip quickly put into perspective for Ratchet why Sunny

had suddenly decided he wanted blue optics. Primus, if he could just strangle that pit-spawned scientist, he would gladly do it. He held Sideswipe a little closer, sighing. “Do you want to know what I was made for?” Ratchet waited just long enough to feel a little nod before continuing, “I was a senator, back when we had those. A politician. I *hated* it. Prime? He was an archivist. He worked under Alpha Trion. So many of the other mechs here have similar stories. Just because you were made for something, does not mean you need to get stuck doing that.

“You are your own mech.” Ratchet said, holding Sideswipe back as he kneeled down before him. “You can make your own choices, become whoever you want to be. Want to fight in this war? Well, I won’t like it, but I won’t try too hard to stop you. Want to become as scientist, or a medic?” He winked playfully at that, actually getting a teary smile from the youngling. “I’ll support you no matter what you chose to do. You don’t have to be a murder machine, and you are definitely one of the least evil mechs ever, aside from Bumblebee. That mechling could end this war with a smile at old bucket head, I swear.”

Sideswipe was laughing more boisterously now, nodding some. “Bee’s the cutest.”

“Aw, I don’t know about that.” They both looked up to see Wheeljack in the doorway, a half asleep Sunstreaker in his arms. “You guys give him a run for his money sometimes, especially when he decides to throw a tantrum. Optimus has really spoiled him.”

Ratchet sighed, smiling gently as he shook his head. ‘*What was Sunny doing up?*’

‘*Got scared when he woke up and Sides wasn’t there. Figured he must have come to you, so we did too.*’ Wheeljack explained, setting Sunstreaker down to go sleepily stand next to his twin. The two were obviously discussing something, hands twitching occasionally as they looked at each other.

‘*Let’s go get them settled back in. We’ll need to talk to Smokey tomorrow.’*

Wheeljack moved to pick Sunny back up, Sides looking expectantly at Ratchet. ‘*After Sunshine’s optics.*’ His sparkmate snorted a laugh as Ratchet scooped up Sides. He just rolled his eyes and nodded. At least they had a plan.

. . .

‘*Ready?´* Wheeljack asked over their bond, his anticipation and excitement bleeding over with it.

He had yet to unpack a few of the items, but most of it was set up. No sense it delaying it any further. ‘*Alright, you can send him in.*’ Ratchet stood before the door, waiting for it to slide open. An almost nervous excitement bubbled up inside of him, almost flowing over when the door did open to reveal Sunny looking confused on the other side. It was still odd, seeing him with bright blue optics, but not unwelcome. He watched the youngling hobble cautiously in on his crutches. Wheeljack was practically vibrating with excitement behind him.

“What’s going on?” There was that untrusting edge to Sunny’s voice that he still had occasionally.

Ratchet stepped out of the way so that Wheeljack would not just shout out the surprise then and there. “Smokescreen thought it would be a good idea… y’know, to take up a constructive hobby. You already kinda did this anyway, so...” Ratchet shrugged, motioning at all of the containers of paint, brushes, and canvases scattered about what had once been the CMO’s office in their quarters. Sunny just stared, unable to really process it as Ratchet spoke. “Initially he suggested you hang around Wheeljack, maybe blow off steam by blowing things up, but… well, I thought this was a little more suited to you. Recklessly blowing things up is more Sideswipe’s style.”

He finally turned skeptical cobalt optics on the medic, uncertainty probably as clear on his face as it was over their bond. “You… got me more art supplies?” The simple question got him a nod in reply. “And you emptied out your office for me to paint in?” Another nod. “Why?”

Ratchet snorted, crossing his arms over his chest and actually looking away. “Because you’re my youngling – not by CNA, but by what counts. I want you to be happy and healthy, Sunny, just as any other creator would.”

“*Our* youngling.” Wheeljack corrected, giving Ratchet a teasing look. The medic rolled his optics but said nothing in response.

The yellow youngling continued to just look around at everything. Sideswipe came rushing over, looking almost panicked; Sunstreaker had been so overwhelmed by it that he startled his twin. Sides’ mouth fell into an ‘o’, blinking some. “It’s an art room.”

“Studio.” Sunny whispered softly, little tears welling up in his optics now. “Artists call it a studio.” His little chin quivered some, looking

between Ratchet and ‘Jack quickly. “I-I…” The words would not come, though, his tears and feelings overwhelming the poor youngling. They knew what he meant, though.

Wheeljack scooped Sunny up moving to hug Ratchet with the youngling between them. Sideswipe wedged his way into the hug as well, wrapping him around both of their legs. “You’re welcome, Sunshine.” A small grumble of ‘that’s not my name’ had the four of them all laughing happily, lightening the mood once more.

Chapter 14

Sunny's first painting was of the rings, a shadowy figure looming up above matching red and yellow silhouettes. There was no distinct shape to the figure up in the stands, staring down upon the two who stood proudly atop the shell of a much larger mech. When asked, Sunny just grumbled about artistic interpretations and shooed mechs away. Ratchet knew better, though, could tell by the way Sideswipe had tensed up at the sight of the painting.

It was intended to be their sire. A mech they had never before met. Ratchet had always assumed that they did not care to know who their sire was; perhaps he had been wrong. But something had been bugging Sunstreaker since they got Prime back from Shockwave's base. They had hoped it would calm down some after changing his optic color, but if his painting was anything to go by, it had not.

If anything, the mechling was now more secretive. As was Sideswipe. It was troubling Ratchet, but Wheeljack insisted that they give the twins their space. “They'll come to us when they're ready. You know they will.” And ‘Jack was right. They always did.

Something was up, however, so no one could blame Ratchet for reaching out to Red Alert. The mech monitored *everyone*. He would know what was going on.

“They've been sparring on the lower levels.”

The amount of nonchalance Red said that with was almost as stunning as what he said. Ratchet blinked his optics many times before managing to growl out, “what?”

Red did not seem bothered by the growl, shrugging and pulling up a vid feed of the sparring room. Sure enough, there they were. “They do this almost every orn. I assumed you were the one who gave them clearance down there, since they were using your credentials to get in.”

The twins were dead. He had known of their occasional sparring, but had simply assumed they – like most younglings – were just wrestling on their berth or in the main room of their quarters. Somewhere safe, and certainly not with their weapons.

“Well, you assumed wrong!” Ratchet snapped, standing up quickly.

“They're only 40 vorns old!”

Red still looked unbothered, shrugging. “They've been in battle before. Why would I think they weren't allowed down there?”

“Because they're 40 vorns old!” Ratchet stomped off exasperatedly, letting the door to the security mech’s office slam behind him. ‘*They're dead. Our mechlings are dead.*’ Ratchet grumbled over his bond to Wheeljack, startling the scientist only briefly before Ratchet shared the conversation he had just had with him.

‘*Don't be so dramatic, Ratch.*’ Wheeljack teased, just fanning the flames of Ratchet's anger even more. ‘*They're just kids.*’

Which was no excuse, if you asked Ratchet. He did not bother to respond to ‘Jack; it was obvious the other was not on his side in this. Not yet, at least. When he was done with those younglings, he would, though.

The doors to the lower deck training area slid open before him, and he heard two matching sets of feet scurrying into hiding quickly. “Nice try, younglings.” Ratchet grumbled. He moved into the room, optics easily picking up the twins' heat signatures. “You're horrible at hiding. In case you were wondering. A couple of crates set up for bots to relax on during breaks? Not good at masking heat signatures.”

Ratchet had his arms crossed over his chest when the twins finally emerged. Sideswipe and Sunstreaker at least had the decency to hang their helms in shame, Sunny favoring the leg he had broken not too long ago. “You're still supposed to be on crutches!”

“We're sorry,” Sides spoke first, because of course he did. Sunny just avoided optic contact, trying to stand up straight. “We just-"

Ratchet gave no time for the excuse to come. “Just what? Trying to kill yourselves? Break Sunny's legstrut again? Give me a spark attack?” He did his best to keep his field as close to his armor as possible, to not let the anger and anxiety just roll off of him in waves. To keep the fear of losing them both to a freak accident from showing.

It was Sunstreaker who answered. “I didn't want to be a burden anymore.” He finally looked up, optics full of that same stubborn determination they always had. “We used to train all the time. And when we did, before, we- we never lost. Never really got hurt. But this time, with Prime and Jazz-"

“You think, because you haven't trained, you got hurt.” Ratchet clarified, shaking his helm. They had fought Shockwave, which is why they had been injured. Even if they both had not panicked, they would not have lasted long without Jazz and Prime's interference. They had to have known that. “You *fought* Shockwave. That mech is insane, and not an easy fight, even if you aren't scared out of your processor of him.”

“We shouldn't have let him get us, though!” Sunny countered, frustration oozing off of him. Sides just gave a small nod, shifting closer to his brother. “And even if he had, we should have handled it better. Even scared!”

What Ratchet wanted to remind them both of was that they were forty vorns old and allowed to be scared and make mistakes (preferably away from a battlefield, though). He wanted to remind them of their age and get them to act like it. His processor was hung up on the fact that Sunny was technically right. If their battle profiles had taken over, they likely would have handled it differently. But they obviously had not, and whether that was due to their fear of Shockwave or something else, he did not care. It was a sign that perhaps they were not too far gone yet.

With a final shake of his helm, he moved forward and pulled the little red and yellow younglings to him. Sides melted into it immediately, while Sunstreaker almost fought it. Almost. “You shouldn't've been there. You both know that. You're only younglings, and I would appreciate it if you could wait at least another ten vorns before continuing actually training. Be *younglings* for a bit. Enjoy it.” He held them both back, Sides grinning up at him while Sunny tried to force it down and keep that determined look in his optics. He made a very valiant effort to do that, at least.

“C'mon, I think I heard ‘Jack say something about making energon goodies tonight.” *That* did the trick. Sunny lit up like his namesake, practically pushing passed Ratchet to lead the way. Sideswipe was right beside him in an instant, their hands twitching at their sides somewhat. The old habit made Ratchet's spark ache some. They really were just kids. If only he could convince them of that fact.

. . .

“I can *smell* them on you, Sideswipe, empty your hands.” Wheeljack teased, snagging the red youngling before he could get away. Energon goodies had proved to be a big success; so big that the twins

attempted to hoard some away. It was all in good fun, though, both twins laughing brightly. “I said you can have more *after* dinner, you brat.”

Sideswipe giggled, squirming some. “I don’t know what you’re talking about!” He insisted, trying his best to curl up in Wheeljack’s hold. Ratchet shook his head fondly from where he sat on one of the couches, watching as Sunstreaker tried to sneak up on Wheeljack, crutches and all. ‘Jack was ready for him, though. The giggling grew tenfold the second ‘Jack snatched Sunny up to, crutches falling to the ground but none of them caring. “Ratchet!” Both twins called, although the medic struggled to make it out through their laughter.

“Ratchet can't save you from me!” ‘Jack shouted, tacking on the goofiest villainous laugh Ratchet had ever heard.

The medic scowled when ‘Jack stumbled, the three of them collapsing in a pile in the floor. “No one will be able to save any of you if you break Sunny’s leg strut *again.*” He got three sheepish grins in response, having to fight the urge to roll his optics. “Honestly, no wonder it hasn't been healing properly.”

“Sorry, Ratchet.” Sunstreaker spoke first, his twin repeating him shortly after. That spoke for who likely came up with the crazy idea to train themselves. Ratchet would really have to work with both of them, but Sunstreaker especially, it seemed. There was no need to rush into battle anymore. It was time for them to just be younglings, and goof off.

Which Wheeljack was more than happy to help with, it seemed.

. . .

“Y’know… I wasn’t like this before what happened,” Sunny whispered from behind Ratchet, and if he had not set alerts to be sent to him when someone entered the medbay, the medic was sure he would have had a spark attack. He turned, quirking an optic ridge in question and waiting for Sunstreaker to continue. “I used to be… happy. And loud. I used to be normal, like any other sparkling or youngling. Full of life, y’know? Then *he* ruined us and now… I’m always angry, Sides isn’t; I never talk, he never shuts up. It… it made those stereotypes, about splitsparks being just one person in two sparks, seem true. But they’re not! I-I’m still my own mech. I just…”

Ratchet watched as the normally stubbornly confident youngling’s posture slumped some, optics dimming a bit. Sunny looked down at

the floor almost self-consciously, and it hurt. “I’m broken now.”

Ratchet was out of his seat in an instant and charging at the youngling. He gripped him by his shoulder, startling the youngling with a shake. “You are *not* broken, do you hear me?” His tone left no room for argument, dripping in anger at the mere suggestion that one of his younglings were anything less than the perfect creations he knew them to be. “You are fine, just the way you are. Perfect. Don’t let any mech tell you otherwise, and if they do, you let me deal with them. Not being what everyone else thinks is normal *does not* mean broken.”

He was somewhat relieved to see a little smile from Sunny. “I think I can take care of myself, Ratchet.”

“See, that’s the thing, though.” A shake of his helm. Silly youngling. “You don’t have to. That’s my job. Wheeljack’s job. Any full grown mech on this ship would be happy to the same, except maybe Prowl.” A little tap of the other’s chin to get him to look up at him. “You’re just a mechling. Enjoy that. You don’t need to fight, or anything like that. You just… need to be you. Have fun. Learn.”

That little smile shifted into something a little more mischievous, one optic ridge raised in question. “Get into trouble?”

“Leave most of the troublemaking to your brother, please. I don’t need to bail both of you out of the brig.” Ratchet begged, only half joking at the time. “I also would prefer not having to reboot Prowl if you two make him glitch, thank you.”

Sunny moved forward suddenly to hug Ratchet, startling the medic. Sunstreaker was not physically affectionate with any mech outside of Sideswipe, Bumblebee, and Wheeljack (much to the scientist’s delight). Hugs initiated by Sunny were rare for Ratchet. He wrapped the youngling up in his hold, saving every detail of the moment to the list of his favorite moments. He found that to be rapidly growing since the twins joined him. He hoped it continued to do so.

“I love you, Ratchet.” Sunny whispered, and Ratchet’s spark felt ready to burst.

“I love you, too, Sunshine.”

Chapter 15

Sideswipe snatched Bluestreak's hand in his, laughing brightly as he heard Prowl's startled gasp from within the office. "C'mon!" He ordered, tugging the other forward anyway as he began to run away. The Praxian behind him still looked startled but began laughing as well once they made it around a few turns and were further from his older brother's wrath. The laughter was music to Sides audio receptors, bright and lilting and just… perfect. They made it almost all the way to the loading exit, where shipments came in to the base, before both collapsing into each other and giggling softer now.

He had never realized just how *blue* Blue's optics were; they all had blue optics, or now they did at least, but Bluestreak's just seemed so much more so. He did not notice he had been staring at the other until a hand came up and waved in front of his face, Blue snapping two fingers together. "Ya in there, Sides? Didn't somehow loosen any screws up there running, did you? That'd blow. How would I explain that to Ratchet. Oh yeah, Ratch, we decided to put adhesive in my brother's desk chair, and then we were running away, although really we didn't need to, and then he-"

Sideswipe could not tell anyone what came over him at that moment, with Blue just rambling senselessly at him as he tended to do. His hands moved of their own accord, cupping Blue's face in them before he was surging forward. Blue actually squeaked in surprise as Sideswipe brought their lips together and kissed him. It was not particularly sweet or romantic; in fact, it was rough and a tad painful because Sides went in far too quickly. He did not care, though. And with how Blue settled into it after a moment, optics fluttering shut, it seemed the other did not mind either.

Who said first kisses were perfect anyway?

A sudden flare of hurt in his spark had Sideswipe stumbling back, blinking some. Bluestreak just stared dazedly at him, not processing that Sides had moved away quite yet, or why. Sides knew, though. He recognized where that hurt came from, but could not entirely understand why. Why Sunny cared that Sides was so *happy* to be with Blue, why he felt his twin's rage after being unable to block his own happiness and joy from Sunny.

He would talk with the other later, he thought to himself, pushing the bond from the forefront of his processor. For the time being he just

wanted to laugh with Blue and continue their escape from Prowl. If they were lucky, they may even be able to find the jet twins to use as shields.

. . .

A blade rammed through the canvas. It was yanked out, and stabbed back in, over and over again. He just stabbed and clawed at it until there was nothing left. His hand were covered in blue and black, and as he rubbed them together, as if to get it off, it began to look like energon. Like what he had painted come to life. His form, hunched over Sideswipe's dulled, lifeless shell, with energon soaked hands and bright crimson optics. There was no emotion in the optics, no amount of other paint could cover it up or add some to it. There was no remorse or sadness, not like he felt now for just letting it become a thing.

Primus, he was a monster.

He had not been able to stop his anger when his twin decided to so *politely* broadcast what he was up to. To rub it in Sunstreaker's face. So he just painted, and threw all of his anger into that since he could not spar at the moment. His framed heaved with every deep vent as he tried to calm his spark. Perhaps he should leave Sideswipe to the Praxian; in any sense he could, anyway. It was not like the other two could bond together, not with what all the torment Shockwave had put their sparks, through. Sideswipe did not need Sunstreaker. That much was obvious.

Sunstreaker would show the other he did not need him either.

He slunk through their quarters to the washracks, trying to drown his thoughts in the overwhelming heat of the water and the burn of too rough scrubbing at paint on his frame. He did not even notice anyone else enter until suddenly the spray stopped. His faceplate was still wet, tears dripping steadily down his faceplate. A plush towel enveloped him, a familiar field brushing against his as he was picked up. *Wheeljack*. He heard the soft shushing from the other, curling into his hold like an upset little sparkling and hating that he could not keep himself from doing it.

“Let's get you dried up, okay, Sunshine?” Wheeljack whispered, moving back into the main room of the quarters. “And then maybe you and I can go have some fun, yeah?” He could not find it in himself to answer, just nodding and burrowing deeper into the towel.

Wheeljack sighed, drying him slowly and gently. “What sorta fun do we wanna have? I could take you to the lab, we could paint together, read a story, or maybe play a board game?” He watched the yellow mechling carefully, just barely catching the slight raise in his optic ridges at the mention of a board game. “You can pick one out.” He promised. “Although, make sure it works for two players, okay?”

Sunny was off to the game closet the second that his feet hit the ground, towel still draped around his shoulders. Wheeljack settled onto the couch, setting Ratchet the image of their youngling crying softly in the shower and scrubbing his paint off in some parts. The medic's alarm flowed through their bond immediately. Wheeljack quickly sent a pic of the youngling rummaging through the closet now. ‘*He is better now. He'll need a patch job, if you still have paint nannites in his color.*’

‘*Of course I do*,’ if Ratchet could have rolled his optics, Wheeljack was sure he would have. ‘*Where is Sides? I'm surprised he didn't beat you to Sunny.*’ Which was surprising to ‘Jack as well, but he did not feel like asking Sunny about it. Sides would either show up soon, or Sunny would tell them what had him so distraught.

“Can we play this one?” The small voice snapped Wheeljack from the conversation, looking down to Sunstreaker. With the towel wrapped around him and the board game in his arms, he looked like a 40 vorn old youngling.

Wheeljack took the board game, slipping down onto the floor and beginning to set it up. Sunny sat next to him, which was not very conducive to playing a board game. But he would not stop him. “This one is perfect, Sunshine.” They started the game, making it through a couple full games by the time Ratchet made it back from his shift, nannites and applicator in hand.

Sunstreaker spotted what was in his hand immediately and quickly looked to his own paint job and the few spots of gray peeking through the yellow. He had not noticed it until now, amazingly, and was glad for it. The slightest smudge in his paint drove him up the wall, and had he noticed these, they surely would have ruined his time with Wheeljack. As it was, he wanted to snag the paint from Ratchet to fix his finish immediately. He resisted, though.

Ratchet could see the distress growing, fondly chuckling as he moved to sit beside Sunstreaker and Wheeljack. “Scrub a little too hard, mechling?” He asked as he prepared the paint and applicator while

Wheeljack gently took the towel from where it still hung around Sunstreaker's shoulders. “Get paint on yourself?” That got him the tiniest of nods. “Any reason why?”

“Sideswipe is gonna replace me. With *Bluestreak*,” He practically hissed the other youngling's name. It seemed the orn that Ratchet and Wheeljack had been desperately hoping to avoid had finally come. Although he seemed the more independent of the twins, Sunstreaker still had separation anxiety when away from Sideswipe at time. It had been a work in progress, and Sunny had slowly gotten to the point where he no longer worried the entire time Sides snuck off to pull one of his dumb pranks that his brother had abandoned him forever.

Unless Bluestreak was involved.

“He can't replace you, Sunshine.” Wheeljack reassured him, looking to Ratchet.

“He can't. For a few reasons.” Ratchet said, tapping the top of Sunny's helm gently to get him to look at him. “You're his twin. His actual other half. And because of… your carrier, I do mean that quite literally. And you both know that. Your bond is unique. Not even a sparkmate could replace the bond you two have. The closest thing to it is a gestalt bond.”

Sunny scowled, curling in to Wheeljack's side more. He pulled his field as tight to himself as he could, but his fear and anger at the mention of Shockwave was evident. “I know. We're freaks.”

“Unique,” Ratchet corrected, flicking Sunstreaker between his optics. “Now stand up so I can make sure I don't miss anything, unless you *want* to have weird gray splotches in your paint job?” That got him a tiny helm shake as the other scrambled to stand before him. “Good. I'm sure ‘Jack also does not want any yellow bits on his armor.”

‘Jack laughed some, shrugging. “I dunno, whaddya think, Sunny? Could I pull off yellow?”

That actually got him a contemplative look from the youngling, who quickly shook his helm. He ignored Ratchet's snort as ‘Jack frowned. “It wouldn't match your green and red accents. They would clash. And then I couldn't go to the rec room with you.”

‘Jack let out a gasp at that, falling back onto the floor entirely and throwing a hand over his forehelm. Sunny snickered softly at the dramatics, although he was careful to stay still while Ratchet worked.

“You wound me! What happened to my sweet little Sunshine?”

Sunny's nasal plating crinkled at that. “My name isn't Sunshine, and you bots never knew me when I was little!” Which sounded like something a sparkling might say, but he ignored that.

“I can still carry you like a sparkling, though, so that makes you little!” ‘Jack countered, reaching out to ever so lightly tickle the side of Sunny Ratchet was not painting. “You're my little bright ball of Sunshine!”

Sunny laughed so brightly that it was almost easy to forget finding him scalding his own paint off and crying in the wash racks. He finally seemed like a mechling again, if only for a moment. Wheeljack wanted to capture the moment in time, and hold on to it. Show it Sunstreaker anytime he got into a funk to show him. *‘They deserved better than that fragger gave them.’* He mourned their lost sparkling days over his bond with Ratchet, the other giving him a sad smile.

‘*We're giving them better.’*

. . .

Another two spark days came and went before they knew it. Ratchet grew more worried with each passing orn. Sides found himself in increasingly more trouble, pranks becoming more elaborate and dangerous. He absolutely refused to do anything constructive with himself. Wheeljack tried desperately to get him to come to the lab with him, but over time that seemed to make everything worse. All that scientific genius was just wasted.

Sunstreaker was no better. He started to become more easily agitated, locking himself up for orns at a time to paint. He only ever came out when Ratchet threatened to remove the door. If he was not there, he was sulking in the rec room. Occasionally, Sideswipe would join him, and the two would whisper to themselves in the corner. It felt like all of the progress had made with the twins since they first arrived was for nothing. He was practically driving himself mad trying to come up with a way to fix all of this.

In the end, it was Prowl's idea. The SIC mentioned it during an officer meeting, almost offhandedly. “Why not allow Sunstreaker and Sideswipe to begin combat training? We could still place a limit on when they are allowed to join any battles, but that would get them the best and most possible training.”

And it made sense. Of course it did. However, it did not mean that Ratchet liked it. At all. They were still barely younglings in his mind. They were not far off of being eligible to begin combat training by that point, but it did not mean Ratchet wanted to let it happen any sooner than he knew it inevitably would.

The Twins were fighters; had been since before they joined the Autobots. And they had never truly stopped their training they did alone. At least this way, he knew Ironhide or Jazz would be around to make sure they did not kill each other.

. . .

Ironhide approached them both in the rec room late one orn, the twins having secluded themselves to a back corner and whispering to each other. They both looked up, Sideswipe grinning and his twin just lifting a brow plate. It was so bizarre, seeing how vastly different the two were personality-wise. Where Sideswipe was always friendly now that they had settled in with the Autobots, Sunstreaker was still closed-off and skeptical. He really only opened up around their guardians, Jazz, and for some odd reason, Prowl. Ironhide would never be able to wrap his processor around that one.

He cleared his throat, hoping to speak uninterrupted but knew that was unlikely with Sideswipe. “I've been asked to monitor your sparring, if you plan to continue doing so even without his permission. Or clearance to be down on that level of the base.” He leveled a pointed look to them both and was surprised that Sunstreaker was the one with the decency to look at least a little ashamed.

“I have no clue what you are talking about, Hide, but thanks for the offer! We would love to train with you, right, Sunshine?” A red elbow jabbed into his twin’s side, getting a snarl from Sunny who hit his brother forcefully upside the helm and eliciting a yelp from the other.

“My name is not Sunshine,” came the snarl Ironhide just knew was coming, having to do his best to keep his smile off his face as Sunstreaker turned back to him. It obviously did not work too well, judging by the scowl Sunny shot his way. “If Ratchet wants someone watching us, sure.” They had kept their promise, for the most part, and had not sparred with actual weapons since Sunny’s leg had healed from saving Optimus nearly a vorn ago. But they needed to do *something*. If they were not allowed to actually fight yet, they should at least be allowed to do this.

Ratchet apparently finally agreed.

Both twins were mildly surprised by the sudden schedule Ironhide sent their way; a *training* schedule. “Normally, you would both be required to wait until you were at least 50 vorns old to even consider starting combat training.” Hide explained, both twins too focused on the schedule to actually listen to him. “However, you’re not too far off of that. And you have actual battle experience already. So, we are making an exception. You will not be allowed into combat until 70 vorns still, but the officer core believes this is an easy way to keep you two outta trouble.”

“And you?” Sunstreaker asked, dismissing the schedule after setting the necessary reminders for it.

“I saw Sideswipe take out half of a patrol by himself. I was the one who brought him in. You two could be valuable assets, if you don't get yourselves killed playing warrior by yourselves.” Ironhide responded, ignoring twin scowls at that. “Plus, Prowl might brick his processor if that one-“ he pointed to Sideswipe “-doesn't stop with the pranks. And we kinda need him.”

“Is this some ploy to just keep us occupied?” Sunstreaker asked, surprising Ironhide with how chatty he seemed to be that orn.

Ironhide shrugged. In all honesty, it partially was. But Prowl had been right when he had said that this extra training could greatly benefit both the twins and the Autobot army. Those two had the makings of deadly warriors, if someone could help them clean up their fundamentals a bit first. They had also only ever dealt with close ranged, melee weapons. Blasters and other ranged weapons could potentially take some adjusting. “Not entirely.” Ironhide finally said. “You'll start working with me alone, and eventually Jazz will come along when I think you both need more of a challenge.”

Sideswipe quirked an optic ridge at Ironhide. “And Ratchet and ‘Jack actually okayed this?” He seemed extremely doubtful, for which he could not blame the mechling. Most guardians and creators fought with their everything to keep their younglings from entering the war. Ratchet and Wheeljack had no choice. The Twins were already a part of the war before they even came to them, and the mechs had explained this when asking Ironhide to start their training specifically. It would be foolish of them to keep fighting it. The twins would join the fighting eventually anyway. They were better off ensuring they were 100% prepared instead of trying to hold them back.

“We start tomorrow, bright and early. Keep me waiting, and I tack on an extra joor.” Ironhide called, leaving before they could really protest any of it. He was sure they would be on time the next orn. If not, they would learn to be.

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

> ... yeah, this one just kinda became a behemoth. I've been going through and re-writing a lot of the bits I already have written and just...
> This happened.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Training the twins was an interesting change of pace for all mechs involved. It gave both Ironhide and Jazz a decent workout, as well, with the current lull in Decepticon activity leaving everyone stagnant. The twins were on time every orn, and often worked for an extra joor anyway. It gave them both something to focus on and channel their stray energy into. It also gave Jazz a look into their battle profiles, which in turn allowed him to help twins learn how to keep the stray protocols from taking over. It was very slow going, but he saw a lot of improvement during their training.

Sunstreaker was not improving outside of training, though. He still sulked about, snapping at anyone who so much as came close to brushing against him and tarnishing his finish. If anything, training made him worse, because he was now quicker and becoming gradually deadlier. He hardly spoke, but when he did, it was sharp and snarky. The only mech to actually get through to the mechling other than Sideswipe was Wheeljack. Ratchet thanked Primus that it seemed Sunny still listened when the scientist spoke to him. One utter of the word Sunshine from ‘Jack and it almost seemed like they had their Sunny back.

Almost.

“Hey, Sunny, can you watch Bee alone tomorrow?” Sides asked, knowing that Sunny was painting and thus not paying attention really to what he was being asked. Wheeljack had managed to drag him out to the main room of their quarters, so Ratchet could watch him.

“After training?” Sunny asked, not glancing up as he made small, careful brushstrokes. Ratchet could just barely make out what appeared to have been the once immaculate entrance to the Archives. He did not dare ask how Sunny had stumbled upon the archives; he could guess easily enough.

Sides nodded quickly, before realizing his twin was not looking. “Yeah, if that's okay with you.”

Ratchet waited for the answer with Sideswipe, holding in a vent as Sunny stopped painting suddenly, just staring at his canvas. After what felt like a whole joor, he finally shrugged. “Alright. But you get to be the one to tell the bitlet he is just hanging out with me.”

“He *loves* spending time with you!” Sideswipe teased a bit, nodding. “I'm sure the two of you will have fun.”

“Without you? Definitely.” Sunstreaker snarked, painting once more. He felt the brief wave of hurt over their bond, and confusion over his bond with Ratchet, but ignored both. Sideswipe was rushing away quickly, likely to go see Bee or *Blue*.

The door had barely shut before he felt Ratchet approaching, disappointment evident in his field. “Sunstreaker,” Ratchet started, voice firm. He waited for a moment, before speaking again. “Sunny, look at me.”

A bored, cobalt stare turned his way, paint brush set to the side. “Yes?”

“What was that?” The medic had never seen Sunstreaker be so short and rude with his twin. He waited a few kliks for a response, and when he got none, he huffed. With a quick hand, he snagged the paint brush, getting a hot glare from the youngling. “What has gotten into you, mechling?”

“Nothing!” There was anger all throughout Sunny's field, glaring openly at Ratchet like he never had before. “I just want to paint! Can I not do that?” He seemed almost flustered, just barely shifting enough for Ratchet to notice.

He was uncomfortable.

Ratchet was never one to push the twins, even if he wanted nothing more than to demand to know what was bothering Sunstreaker. They always came to talk to him about stuff eventually, when they were comfortable. With a long sigh, he set the paint brush back down. “Be easier on your brother, please.” He waited for the tiniest of nods before moving away once more. Sunstreaker would talk to either him or ‘Jack eventually. He was sure of it.

. . .

The two giggled quietly, forehelms pressed together as they just sat there. The silence did not last long between them, though, Bluestreak's anxiety getting the better of him. “Uh, Sides? D-do you like me?”

The red youngling pulled a face at that, snorting. “I hope you already know the answer to that, Blue. I brought you to my favorite place!”

“Which we are definitely getting in trouble for later,” Bluestreak reminded. But he found that he did not mind the idea of a little trouble. The fun was definitely worth it. And so long as neither of them were hurt or did anything *too* bad, Prowl wouldn't punish them too horribly.

Sideswipe stood at that, stepping back some and holding his hand out to Bluestreak. He had that devious glint in his optics that always managed to pull Blue in, grinning down at the other youngling. “C'mon, let's go exploring.”

And there was much to explore around Iacon. If they were daring enough, they could go to the archives, but Alpha Trion was likely to catch them if they were too loud. And that old mech, while supposedly harmless, terrified Sideswipe. He could not quite place why. With that in mind, he led then away from the Archives, closer to the edge of the city. Although much of Iacon had been destroyed, the golden architecture in many places was still together enough for the younglings to play around on it and just stare in wonder.

Bluestreak actually began to lead the way, something very unusual for the timid mechling. He was so excited and *happy*. It was almost overwhelming. He would stay there forever, if given the chance. Smiling back at Sideswipe, had the other thinking something very similar, yet for different reasons.

. . .

Bee was always happy to just sit with Sunstreaker, which suited the youngling just fine. The two sat together while Sunstreaker painted in the rec room, having been chased out of their quarters by Ratchet with the threat of no more paints period if Sunstreaker returned before Optimus retrieved Bee. A few mechs had the nerve to walk by and check out what he was painting, but none were brave enough to speak to him. Even with sweet little Bumblebee snuggled up to him.

They were pathetic.

“Sunny?” Bee asked softly, looking up from his place in Sunstreaker's

lap. “I help?”

He almost said no. To anyone else, he would have. They would just ruin it. Bee was no different in that respect. However, Sunstreaker could paint another by himself later. It was not often that he got quality time like this with the bitlet. He would not let his sour mood from being ignored at every turn that orn ruin his time with the one mech not ignoring him. So, instead he nodded, moving Bee onto the table next to his painting supplies and letting the little mech finger paint with him.

If he shut his bond to Sideswipe with all the force and emphasis he could muster while doing so, well… no one else would know but them anyway.

(Optimus was extremely annoyed to see Bee covered in paint a few short kliks later but did not let it show outwardly. The two mechlings were grinning too brightly at their own mess for him to feel the need to scold anyone.)

. . .

Sideswipe froze suddenly, staggering a bit before collapsing. Bluestreak was by his side in an instant kneeling by him at the ledge. “Sides? Sideswipe, are you okay? Did you trip? Is something wrong?” He said it all quickly, looking around as if someone could help them. If he were honest, he had half-expected Jazz or Mirage to follow them. It was always rare that he was allowed anywhere without supervision. There was no one rushing forward to help them.

“Sunstreaker.” Sideswipe breathed out, trying to force himself up but only managing to sit up some. “I-I can't- I can't feel him.” He was leaning back more, optics distant as if he were trying to focus entirely on finding his twin again. Bluestreak noticed him leaning too late, reaching out to just barely snag Sideswipe's forearm before the other was tumbling over the ledge. The force of it yanked Blue's arm from the socket, but he did his best not to let go.

Flinging his bond to Prowl open, he sent the other a quick burst of his panic before able to coherently say anything. The SIC was immediately attentive, responding with, ‘*Bluestreak? What is wrong? Where are you?’*

‘*N-near the Archives, with Sideswipe.’* The other's anger was immediately apparent, but Prowl did not respond immediately. ‘*Something happened, and he fell over a ledge. I-I've got him, but I don't*

know how much longer.'

There is a brief silence across the bond that feels like it is lasting forever, before Prowl is speaking again. *'First Aid is on his way. Hang tight.'* His voice is cool and even, but Bluestreak knows better; Prowl is livid.

'*S-sorry, Prowl.'* And he was. Primus, was Bluestreak sorry. He was never leaving the base ever again. He may never leave his room ever again, if Prowl didn't force him to live with Smokescreen after this.

There was no threat of that yet, though. Just a short, '*We will discuss this later,'* before Prowl's presence was closed off again.

. . .

Sunny was startled when he saw Jazz suddenly leap over the table he had been sitting at in the rec room before sprinting out the door. He had secluded himself into the back corner like usual, just to watch all the other mechs interact. No one else paid Jazz much mind, but his expression startled Sunstreaker. Something was wrong, and he was going to find out what.

Without a word – not that anyone would have cared – Sunny went after Jazz, quick to follow. He was surprised to find Jazz standing there just outside the rec room door, as if he were waiting for Sunny to follow. He skid to a halt, nearly smacking into the mech, who shook his head. "You need to stay here. Ratchet's orders. You're just gonna make the situation worse."

"What?" His voice was a mixture of confusion and annoyance. What situation was going on that Sunstreaker could have a-

Sideswipe.

Arms were around him before he could shove his way passed Jazz, holding him back and pinning his own arms to his side. He could not lash out or strike the mech properly, so he settled for trying to kick him. "Let me go!" He yelled, struggling to keep his field tight. He had told the other heading out into Iacon was a bad idea with Bluestreak, but when had Sideswipe ever listened to him? Never. And now something was bad enough that he could worsen a situation? Frag, he was so stupid for closing the bond. "He needs me! Let me go!"

"If he needed ya that bad, you woulda known." Jazz countered, tightening his grip some. He was a small mech, but he still had a little

bit of height on both twins, thankfully. “If he was really hurt, you would know, right?”

Sunstreaker honestly did not know. He had never managed to shut Sideswipe out so completely. It was very likely that he would, yes, but Sunstreaker could not be sure. And he did not want to test it further to find out. He nodded instead, because Jazz was likely right. Even when he slipped into his battle protocols completely, Sideswipe's extreme pains would pull him out of it. “I-I think so.”

The grip finally slackened some, and in an instant, Sunstreaker was running for it with Jazz hot on his heels. True or not, he needed to see Sideswipe. He had to make sure he was okay. Because he felt absolutely nothing from the other and was having trouble figuring out how to feel him there again. How to track him on the ship even. He was lost, freezing as he realized that and listening to Jazz skid to a stop behind him.

“… mechling?” Jazz asked softly, settling a hand on one of Sunny's shoulder struts. “Is he alright?” *Are you*?

“I-I don't know. I shut him out, and I still can't feel him.” It hurt to say it out loud. A verbal acknowledgment that he had messed up. What if *he* had hurt Sideswipe? What if he somehow broke their bond? He knew the other was still alive, simply because he was, but that said nothing about the state he was in. “I can't feel him.”

He looked back in time to see Jazz shake his head, sighing some. It felt so odd, visibly disappointing one of the mechs in charge of training him. The mechling executed everything perfectly. He had not seen that look on the other’s faceplate. Sunstreaker did not want to see it again. He already felt bad enough about all of this. Seeing Jazz, fun and carefree Jazz, disappointed in him *hurt*.

Jazz led him down the hall, speaking after a few quiet moments. “He's fine, according to Ratchet. Blue's more banged up than he is. They'll both be okay.”

Bluestreak. Sunstreaker scowled, doing his best to keep his angered field close to his armor. Jazz was bound to feel his annoyance, but the mech did not seem to do anything about it as they finally got with in audio range to hear Bluestreak anxiously muttering to Ratchet and Prowl. Rounding the corner, Sunstreaker saw red. There, knocked out and dented up, was Sideswipe. Ratchet was holding him, readying to move him to the medbay. Because of *Bluestreak*.

“*What did you do?*” Sunny practically screamed, startling all the mechs within hearing distance as he stormed towards Bluestreak. The other youngling’s optics were huge, just standing next to Prowl as Ratchet rolled his optics and moved away. He took a staggered step backwards, trying to put more distance between him and the more volatile of the twin terrors.

“I-I-I tr-tried to catch him! I-I did!” He swore quickly, looking to the other mechs nearby for help, sending a quick wave of anxiety through their bond to his older brother. Sunny was much too close and looked ready to commit murder; Blue did not doubt that he could do it either. “H-he just freaked out suddenly and fell over, and I-I couldn’t pull him up. He was- he was too heavy! Y-you guys both h-have armor, a-and I don’t. I *tried*.” And he had. He had tried so hard that one of his arms was out of the socket still because of it.

Sunstreaker shoved him harshly, sending Blue crashing onto his aft. “If you hadn’t tricked him into sneaking off with you, this wouldn’t have happened!”

“Tricked him?” Blue yelped, because that had not at all been what happened. Sideswipe had *asked him*, not the other way around. Sunstreaker had to realize that out of the two of them, Sideswipe was the schemer. He did not voice this, though, watching as Prowl finally came forward and pinched Sunstreaker’s scruff bar in one hand, causing the youngling to tense up and snarl. Sunny would never hurt Prowl, though, just like he would not hurt Ratchet or Wheeljack. There was an odd amount of respect there that had formed over orns of Prowl dealing with the Twins both on and off-duty.

“Youngling, you know very well who likely planned this outing,” Prowl said softly, gently pulling back a frozen Sunstreaker. Blue watched in amazement as his generally stoic brother wrapped Sunstreaker in a hug and released his scruff bar. Blue would completely credit the change to Jazz and their little flier twins. Prowl had always been loving to him when he was little, but the mech had never shown physical affection to anyone outside of their small family unit. But there he was, rubbing circles between Sunny's shoulder struts as he sobbed into Prowl's chest plate. “Let’s go find Wheeljack, okay?” Prowl said softly, guiding Sunny away to find his other adoptive creator.

Blue startled when a hand rested on his shoulder after the other two left, turning quickly to see Jazz. The other looked disappointed, which made Blue's spark plummet. “You know the rules, Blue. What were

you thinking?"

“H-he said he goes there with Sunny all the time.” Blue stammered out, quivering. “Th-that i-it is p-p-perfectly safe.”

While Jazz did not doubt that, he still shook his helm, “And how many times have Prowler and I told ya never to leave the base?”

Blue's doorwings drooped sadly, “A lot.” And they had. Anytime he or the twins had stared out a window longingly, they had said it. Not that Bluestreak was ever really inclined to go out there; he just barely remembered the last day of Praxus. Bombs raining down from above and seekers cackling haunted his dreams to that very orn. He did not want to go out into that ever again.

Until Sideswipe, who made him feel warm, safe, and like he could do anything.

An arm wrapped around Blue, careful of his doorwings. He looked up at Jazz, the mech offering a gentle smile and a warm field. “We'll leave punishments to Prowler. Let's go save Mirage from ‘Storm and ‘Fire first, then see if First Aid can slip your arm back in the socket really quick.”

Blue huffed, “After getting the twins?”

Jazz smirked, nodding. “This is my punishment. I'm sure you'll prefer it when Prowler is done with ya."

. . .

“He'll be fine,” Ratchet grumbled some, shaking his helm. “A bit banged up, but other than a processor ache from knocking his helm so hard he sent himself into a reboot cycle, he is *fine*.” He emphasized the last word to Sunny, who still hovered around his twin's berth in the medbay. The yellow twin did not seem to care, however, field still overflowing with anxiety. With an exasperated sigh, Ratchet snagged Sunny and lead the hesitant mech to his office, leaving Sideswipe to finish his reboot cycle in peace. “He's fine. I know you know he is. You can feel that he is okay, right?” An ashamed look had Ratchet scowling. “Sunstreaker.” All he needed to do was say the other's name, and the yellow twin's ashamed look morphed into an angry glare.

“They were off being *together* and I got tired of being ignored and replaced and just-" Sunstreaker balled his hands up into fists, hitting them against his thighs. “I shut him out. So, no, I can't tell he’s

alright."

"Can't?" Ratchet asked. Because that implied that Sunny still had the bond shut, which was something that Sideswipe had always said they could never pull off to begin with. "Why?" *How?*

"I just- I can't stand it!" Sunstreaker shouted, field full of rage as tears welled up in his optics. "They- it's-" He stumbled of his words, clenching his fist tightly together before him as if he were tearing some. The youngling looked ready to burst, frame practically vibrating with anxiety. Finally, a small broken voice escaped him. "Why am I not enough?"

It always came back to this. Ratchet supposed it made sense, why Sunstreaker was so attached. All they had until recently was each other. There was not a doubt in his processor that a part of them both had imagined that was all they would ever have. All they might ever need. Sideswipe had pretty easily let go of that sentiment, moving on quickly to hanging out with other mechs around base. Ratchet had assumed Sunstreaker had, as well. The shivering, angry mess before him seemed to prove otherwise.

"Do you need to be?" The medic asked softly, kneeling down next to Sunny. "I don't think anyone mech should be able to take up all of another mech's attention. That'd be difficult to do with the dullest of mechs, let alone someone like Sideswipe." That only got him a scowl, but Sunny was not moving away from him, so Ratchet continued. "Mechs have all sorts of mental and emotional needs, Sunny. No one mech can fulfill those. Is Sides enough for you? Honestly? Could you spend the rest of your life with just Sideswipe and be fine?"

Without a second of hesitation, Sunny answered. "Of course. He's my literal other half. He is all I need. I thought I was all he needed." The last part comes out as a whisper. Before joining the Autobots, they had not spent a lot of time with other mechs outside of training and the rings. Occasionally, one of Soundwave's cassettes may visit, but otherwise, they had been alone. Just the two of them, locked in a dark room with just a berth and each other. But it never stopped them from having fun, from just being younglings. Or, Sunstreaker had believed it had never stopped them. He felt the tiniest shred of doubt, especially when he saw the jet twins with either of their creators.

They had not had that, as sparklings. They had not been loved.

"There is nothing wrong with needing others, besides Sideswipe. You

need Wheeljack and I, right?" Ratchet asked, knowing the answer already.

Or he thought he did, until Sunstreaker was suddenly smiling the tiniest bit. "I need Wheeljack."

Ratchet froze for a second, before flicking the youngling in the center of his helm. "Brat." The answer gave him a bit of hope, though; if only for a little while. He would take it. "You know how to open a bond back up, yes? It's like… picturing a door in your spark and flinging it wide open."

It was obvious that Sunstreaker had not known this, because he immediately looked away. It took a few moments, but suddenly he was grinning back up at Ratchet. "He's back!" His grin was short-lived, Ratchet knuckling him atop his head. It was not entirely gone, though.

"See, you do need me." *And I need you.*

The grin was back in an instant, more blinding than before. Bright as the youngling's namesake. "Of course I do, Ratchet."

. . .

Sideswipe was back up and running in a few joors. Just in time to hear he was restricted to their quarters for the next three orns for the stunt he had pulled with Bluestreak. It would have been only two, but he had practically begged Prowl to go easier on Blue. "It was my idea." With a proud little nod, Prowl had bumped his to three orns and Blue's back down to one.

He kind of regretted it in retrospect, though. He was absolutely bored out of his processor and could tell that Sunstreaker was ready to throttle him. His twin had *abandoned* him in his time of need to go willingly take a history lesson with Prime shortly into the first orn. *Traitor.* Sides could not even go to the lab with 'Jack, or the medbay with Ratchet. It was pure torture. The second they were all back in quarters with him, he latched onto whoever was closest and chattered their audio receptors off.

The second orn was off to a slightly better start after breakfast, however. Ratchet stood suddenly from where they had all four gathered in the main living area for some early orn relaxation, moving to the main entrance of their quarters. And when he came trailing back in, Blue was behind him. Sideswipe wanted to weep tears of joy! "You have a visitor. You two can hang out *here*." Ratchet's tone left no

room for argument, but Sideswipe found he did not care. He was not going to be alone and bored that orn. It was the best news he heard in decacycles!

“And Sunshine here can stay with and make sure you don’t try to sneak off again!” Wheeljack added, earning a death glare from the yellow youngling. ‘Jack moved to nudge Sunny’s shoulder gently as he stood, field brushing against the other’s to share pride and warmth. It did nothing to lighten Sunny’s mood. “We’ll be back when our shifts are over. If anything happens, you know how to get in touch with us.” The scientist kneeled before Sunstreaker, who still looked much less than thrilled. He lightly touched over the youngling’s spark, drawing cobalt optics down to his finger. He looked up again, quirking an optic ridge.

“You’ve got a good spark, Sunshine.” Wheeljack said softly, standing up. “A soft spark. Don’t stay stuck in your own helm, sweetspark.” And with one last pat to the top of his helm, Wheeljack and Ratchet were gone.

Sunstreaker sat there for a moment, Bluestreak and Sideswipe’s chatter drowned out as he did exactly what ‘Jack had told him not to. What did he even know of Sunstreaker’s spark? Medical reports, perhaps. What ever sort of chemical or electrical information there was to know about sparks. Even knowing those things, anyone who knew his past – *their past* – knew Sunstreaker did not have a soft spark. If they watched him in training or saw any of his paintings he hid away, they would know he did not have a good spark. He was not a good mech. He tried, though. Primus, did he try so hard to be good. To prove Shockwave and himself wrong. And maybe one day he would lose or trying would become too difficult to continue doing so. But, while mechs like Wheeljack still believed in him, he almost wanted to believe it were possible to be a truly good mech.

It felt like a weight was pressing in on him, sitting there pondering his hopefully distant future. The day he would lose to that nagging in the back of his processor telling him that this pretending to be good was not worth the sparkache. No longer did he fear somehow coming to over his dying twin; new faces had appeared in his nightmares and on his canvas. Bumblebee. Ratchet. Wheeljack. Each time it felt impossible to recharge after, as if shuttering his optics would let *it* free.

He had been struggling for so long. His entire life, almost. And he knew it was obvious, that other mechs could see his suffering. No one

appeared to care, though. At least not enough to ask. No one other than ‘Jack. Sunstreaker’s shoulders shook slightly as he tried desperately to force down a sob. His spark felt like it would burst from his chest any moment, and he quickly went about shutting himself off from Sideswipe. Not completely this time. Never again. Just enough to hide his own distress.

A hand on his shoulder strut startled him. “Sunny? Are you okay?”

He leapt up, stumbling away some and wrapping his arms around his chestplate as he force himself to calm as much as possible. *Bluestreak*. “Don't touch me!” Sunstreaker snarled at Blue, field practically bristling with his anger. The praxian’s doorwings immediately drooped, shoulders leaning in as he shrunk down some as Sunny stepped towards him. “I *am not* Sideswipe. And you'd better remember it.”

“Hey!” Sides yelled, charging back from their room to shove their brother away from Blue. “What the frag, Sunny?”

He drew his blade following the shove, spreading his feet some to get a better stance. An odd thrill ran through him at Blue's startled optics when they noticed the blade. *He was a monster. Wheeljack was wrong.* “I *know* what you did. What you want.”

Blue looked away at that, faceplate flushing just barely. Sides just leveled him with a glare, drawing his own blade. “And? I didn't know I wasn't allowed to have other friends." He spread his feet some, bracing himself just in case. As if that could stop Sunstreaker, if he really wanted to tackle the other. He wanted to laugh.

“You kiss all of your friends, brother?” The bitterness dripping from Sunny's voice could have melted the paint off of all three of their frames. “And think maybe *I* feel something for him, just because you do? You like to forget that we may be spark twins, but that *does not* mean that I will feel the same slag you do *emotionally*. And I don't want to!” He did not *need* that pitiful praxian. He did not even need Sideswipe. Not really. Sunstreaker could handle himself. “You want me gone.” *They did not need him, none of them. They would be much better off with him gone.*

He was not expecting the exasperated sigh from his brother but ignored it all the same. Sideswipe threw his arms up, groaning. “Primus, you diva! I don't want you gone! And I don't want you to like Blue like *I* do!” He subspaced the dagger again, stepping towards

his still armed twin. “Will you put your dagger away, you brat? I just want you two to be *friends*. So, I can hang out with you both. But getting you to talk with other mechs recently has been like pulling denta! You're shutting yourself away from everyone! Even Wheeljack and Ratchet, and you act like I must, too!”

Sunny’s shoulders slumped forward some, scowling at the ground now instead of his twin. “I have not been.” It was a lie. But he was doing it for their own good. And if they cared, they would have pushed him more. Any of them could have reached out, spoken to him. No one did, though. Mechs always stared at him like he was an anomaly in the rec room, avoided him like the plague. Like they could sense he was going to snap one day.

He had not been the first one to shut anyone out. He had only returned the favor.

“They're waiting for you to *want* to open up, you overgrown sparkling.” Sides grumbled at Sunny, earning himself a sharp glare. “Oh, if you didn't want me answering you, you wouldn't broadcast your thoughts over the bond, so don't give me that look.”

Sunstreaker looked away once more, finally subspacing his blade again. If they wanted him to open up to them, would they not try to get him to? If they cared, they would show it. He was sure of it. An exasperated sigh next to him had him questioning that line of thinking, though. A hand rested between his shoulder struts, startling him some. He looked up to see Bluestreak offering a hesitant smile.

“I really would like to be friends, Sunstreaker. Sideswipe talks about you all the time.” He could feel his twin’s embarrassment about that fact over the bond, easing his own anxiety some. “I think it would be cool to hang out, if you want. We can even ditch Sideswipe sometimes.” The indignant squawk that escaped the red twin had them all laughing loudly at that.

Sunny's frame finally eased some as he offered the tiniest of smiles back to Blue. “Okay.”

Chapter End Notes

> So, let me know if any of you would be interested in reading any of the one-shots I have separated out from the rest of this. I have quite a few, but I don't really want to post them unless people want them. I also likely would only post them after anything they could potentially spoil in the main story has happened.

As always, thanks for your eternal patience with my crazy update schedule. I promise to get better. (Or at least update once a month)

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

> Moving and starting a new job kinda ruins planned updates. Sorry, dudes.

It was not an immediate improvement in Sunstreaker's behavior. It still took decacycles for the other to open up and not lash out at mechs. But Ratchet and Wheeljack saw the slow progress and were immensely relieved. Their youngling was back. And better, if you asked them. No longer did he stay cooped up their quarters when not in training or sulk in the rec room. He went out and explored the base with Sideswipe and Bluestreak and took the base's three sparklings on what the little ones had dubbed “adventures”. Ratchet was almost concerned by what that meant until Red Alert assured him it was all harmless, and they stayed on base.

Once more, Ratchet would come back to Sunstreaker pulling out one of the many games Wheeljack had collected over the vorns. The youngling seemed so happy, how could he say no? Even on orns where he simply wanted to collapse and recharge for the next vorn and a half, he would take his place with the other three and play. Because who knew how much longer he would be able to do this? Especially once the twins were cleared for battle.

He wanted to make every happy memory he could, before it was too late. He feared that time coming sooner than he liked, especially with how the twins' training was progressing. Sideswipe had so eagerly told him about them integrating into the current training class, that Bluestreak was a part of. Which only meant one thing to Ratchet: they would be sent to battle soon. Or Prowl would try to send them, at least. Sideswipe and Sunstreaker were still 4 vorns younger than Bluestreak, and Ratchet had hoped to hold on to those last 4 vorns before his younglings were forced back out into the cruel world.

He felt Wheeljack's curiosity through their bond, making him look up from his datapad and across the room to where the other was buried beneath the twins on their couch. Ratchet's spark ached for them to stay like that just a little longer. To have a proper younglinghood, like himself or Wheeljack. They deserved happiness.

‘*They are happy. We're giving them the best we can, and they're happy.*’ Wheeljack answered, giving Ratchet a fond look as he shifted the

twins atop him so he could get more comfortable. '*I definitely miss when they were a little smaller. This was much more comfy then.*'

"Stop movin'," Sideswipe grumbled from his place atop Wheeljack, swatting at the older mech. It got a chuckle from both 'Jack and Ratchet, the two smiling between each other. "Recharge."

The scientist stroked the back of Sideswipe's helm gently, nodding. "Yessir." A soft look from the twins to Ratchet. '*Don't stress as much, Ratch. They'll both be fine. They're not going anywhere soon. That was already agreed upon, right?*'

He was right. Ratchet knew he was, but that sense of dread would not leave his spark. Like something bad was going to happen. His spark had never led him astray before; not when he gave up being a senator, or when he decided to take a chance on a reckless young scientist. Or when he decided to finally give in and admit that those two brats snuggled up with Wheeljack were meant to be his. Wheeljack may be right, that they were not in immediate danger. But danger was coming for them, and soon. He just knew it.

. . .

"Why do you and Streaker still share a berth?" Blue asked nonchalantly, taking in the twins' room as the other two dug around in their mess of a closet for the holovid they wanted. Both shrugged, Sideswipe answering aloud.

"It feels weird to sleep apart."

Sunstreaker tacked on more, "We only have when I first got here, and we were in the medbay. It felt…"

"Wrong." The two scowled at each after saying that together before going back to their rummaging. They despised doing that, but found it unavoidable on occasion.

Blue hummed some, moving to sit on the two berths that were shoved together. "Like Fire and Storm? How they don't want to be apart? Because you share a spark." A huff, and he found himself face to face with Sunstreaker suddenly.

"We do not share a spark. Our sparks split off from one another. It's not like we have the same spark." He ignored Sideswipe's triumphant shout behind him, taking a step back from Bluestreak when he noticed the other shrink away some. He was trying to be less intimidating, so

he scowled at the floor instead of the other youngling. Sunstreaker did not want to be alone anymore; he would get better at interacting with mechs. Poor Bluestreak just happened to be his practice dummy for this. “We're two halves of a whole. Just like Fire and Storm.”

“Can't have one without the other.” Sideswipe sang, moving to drop the board game on the berth before climbing onto it. “Besides, I doubt I'd be the same person without Sunny.”

The yellow twin rolled his optics as he also climbed on the berth. Bluestreak noted the fondness to the gesture, though, especially as Sunstreaker leaned closer to his twin. “You'd not be *you. We* would be someone completely different if our sparks didn't split.”

It was something they both had pondered in the past. Just *who* they could have been. Would they have survived being with Shockwave long enough to make it to Ratchet? Would they have been completely brainwashed by him and not have wanted to leave? Without being two separate people, they would have not had the *encouragement* to leave. They may have never left. Perhaps they would have done exactly what their carrier had wanted and killed the Prime.

They were both very glad that they had split.

“Did you share a berth when you lived with your creators?” Blue asked, not even thinking about the question. He paid no mind to the twins as he looked over the game Sides had retrieved. “Or did you sleep with them?”

Sideswipe found he could not speak, try as he might. Fear had his spark in a vice grip, field flaring out accidentally before he could rein it in. He sensed Sunstreaker's own distress, felt his sadness. “We didn't have creators like you.” Sunny managed for them both, reaching to grab one of Sides’ hands and squeezing tightly. “We had a berth, barely. Hard as a rock and too small for both of us. We…”

“We made it work.” Sideswipe forced out, finishing for Sunstreaker. He gave a squeeze back, not relinquishing the other's hand as he felt the pity coming off of Blue’s field in waves. “All we had… was each other.”

It was all they had for the longest time, and all they had expected to have until the moment they were sure Shockwave was going to grow tired of them. That moment could have easily been their duel in the Rings, if Sunstreaker had not come back to him in time. They were both grateful it had not been the case. So was Bluestreak, who grinned

brightly at both twins with his doorwings perked up behind him. “And now you both have me!” He declared, pity in his field replaced with vibrant joy.

Sideswipe laughed at that, leaning towards the other on the berth as they began to chatter about the game he had picked out. Sunstreaker sat off to the side, though, watching. He felt *odd*. Like his spark was both light and heavy at one time and he could not fathom how that might be. His body moved on its own, playing the game without him it seemed. He laughed when he would have, goofed off and shoved his brother when he would have, but he could not shake that heavy feeling. It grew steadily, until he felt like he might be crushed by it and suddenly it vanished.

“You okay, Streaker?” Blue asked softly as Sunny quickly cycled his optics to try and clear his processor.

The tiniest of nods. “I think so.” He really hoped so.

. . .

The twins were fans of Blaster almost immediately upon meeting him, especially when the communications officer got together with Jazz. The hilarity and chaos that ensued was always so entertaining. And the *music*. They had both grown to love Jazz's singing alone, but pair that with Blaster's singing and music as well? They were absolutely amazed something like that was possible. Both of them were almost tempted to ask where Jazz had hidden the communications officer away until now.

They loved him even more when they discovered his symbiotes. The first time they encountered Steeljaw their faces lit up and immediately they were following Blaster around for joors asking about them. Which Blaster said was not super surprising. “Hosts, even Soundwave, tend to be softer with younglings because of our symbiotes. I doubt Soundwave woulda visited them much, but if he sent a li’l dude or two, that would make sense.” He assumed it was true with how much the younglings enjoyed being around his symbiotes. Any time they were out and about, the twins were quick to find them.

Which, according to Jazz and Smokescreen, made him the perfect mech to try and find out a little more about what their past was like. As if they did not have adoptive creators to find this out. Blaster wanted to wring all of those mechs necks for waiting this long to try and find anything out, but he would not take it out on the younglings.

Instead, the communications officer set to work, letting the twins spend as much time around himself and his symbiotes as possible. He wanted to gain their trust before he started to figure out what made the mechlings tick. This was not an interrogation, and he did not want them to think that it was.

It did not take much, it seemed. Sunstreaker, sitting stroking Steeljaw's mane while his brother lay next to the feline, was the first one to talk about their past. "I miss Ravage." A quick, obviously honest remark. "He was fun to play with, when we were little."

"And Rumble," Sideswipe tacked on, earning a huff from Steeljaw. "Not that you aren't fun, Steelie. You totally are, right, Sunny?" A quick nod from the other youngling had Steeljaw settling again, but Blaster knew what he was thinking. Now was the time to ask.

So, the red mech went to sit on the floor across from the three before him, ejecting Rewind and Eject to go and sit with the twins as well (*Just in case they get upset!* The two had insisted). Blaster, got as close to optic level with the mechlings as could before asking, "Do you guys ever miss it back there?"

He got two small headshakes, both of the youngling's fields shrinking away from him. Definite no, then. Steeljaw huffed once more, nudging his head under Sunstreaker's hand to get the mechling to keep him petting his mane. It worked as a distraction for the mechling, and felt rather nice for him as well. Blaster watched Rewind and Eject press closer to the younglings, meshing their fields to comfort them.

Finally, Sideswipe gave a verbal response. "It was… really bad. Not just Shockwave and Hook, but…"

Sunstreaker finished for his twin, shaking some. "Everyone. Soundwave's cassettes… they were the only ones really nice to us. Ever. They'd scare other mechs away, and play with us." Little fists clenched as he pulled them into his lap, earning a sigh from Steeljaw who settled his head over them. "They didn't care what we were. Just that we were alright."

A sentiment that Blaster *knew* had to have been shared by their Host. If the circumstances had been different, if Soundwave had more pull… Maybe it was stupid, wishful thinking, but Blaster liked to believe the other Host would have done the right thing. That maybe these younglings would not look so sad and broken at any mention of the 'Cons. Blaster reached out with a soft, comforting field, enveloping the

5 before him happily in it. “Well, I'm glad ya li'l dudes at least had them. And now, you've got all of us here, right?” Two tiny nods. “Y'know, I didn't always have a great life either. Hosts… we were very appealing to mechs before the war. They wanted to use us – use me, because of my symbiotes.

“And I went through Pit because of it for a long, long time. But… that is all behind me.” Blaster murmured as he reached out to scratch Steeljaw behind his audio receptors. “The past is in the past. Ya shouldn't let it define you. Or what any mech says, alright?” He looked between both mechlings, focusing his gaze on Sunstreaker a little longer. “If ya wanna paint, paint. If ya wanna work with ‘Jack to blow up the base, do that.” Sideswipe actually smiled some, giggling softly to himself. “Don't do something cause ya feel ya have to, ‘kay? It never ends well. Trust me.”

Sideswipe actually seemed to perk up some, nodding and chirping a quick, of course. His twin did not, though. Blaster watched as the yellow twin seemed to process his words, struggling almost. Blaster hummed softly to get his attention, snapping the twin from his contemplation. The youngling just scowled, field pulled tightly to his frame still. Blaster felt his unease still, could even see it in his posture and optics. “What's eatin' ya, Sunstreaker?”

The floodgates broke open.

“Wh-what if- what if we were *made* to be evil, though? Made- made from it?” Sunstreaker said quickly, getting a frown from his twin. He did not look surprised; this was not the first time he had heard this, it seemed. “If we have these- these *monsters* inside of us? If we can’t always control them?”

Blaster shrugged, “Don't matter. You just learn to fight it. And ya win.” It was the only advice he could give, really. “And you will win. Just like the rest of us. Think Prime was always the boss? He used to be an archivist! And Ratchet? He was a senator! I ran a popular radio station, which may not surprise ya that much, but not all of us were fighters before the war. And we won’t be after, either. What do *you* want to do with your life? After.”

It was an interesting question for the youngling, who had obviously never thought of an after. He just sat there for a moment, his twin reaching out to him with his field to try and help settle his twin. There was a soft kind of sadness to both of them, one made mostly of resignation. As if they expected to die before it was all over. Both of

them.

Blaster was not cut out for this.

“Maybe race? And paint.” His voice was so small when Sunstreaker finally answered, so unsure. He did not want to get his hopes up. Blaster could not blame him, but felt sad for the youngling all the same.

He offered them both a tiny smile, “You ever raced before? Bet we could snag a practice room to race around in.” He did not need to read their fields to see their excitement at that, quickly sending Ratchet a comm to tell him where his younglings would be before heading off with the twins. His symbiotes could stand to run off some energy, too. It would be good for them all.

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

> New important characters and drama incoming! Next chapter should be up sooner than this one. New job was just chaotic. Sorry, guys!

It was almost comical that the twins somehow managed to pass the finish line at the exact same time *every* race. It was down to a photo finish between them, and even with the photographic evidence, they still argued playfully about who won. It amazed Blaster, really, that the two had engines and frames that could handle such speeds given who their carrier was. Shockwave was not a mech known for his agility, after all. Yet, there they were, flying around the track as fast as they could and smoking the few bots other than his symbiotes who had attempted to race them.

[Think it's time for some reinforcements,] Blaster joked lightly over comms with Jazz. [He done debriefing?]

Jazz's optic roll was impossible to miss, shooting Blaster a look from where he stood off to the side. “Y'know I could beat them. Ya really think we need *him* to tire them out? ‘Sides, Prowler said not to expect him till midorn.”

A laugh slipped out, getting a look from his friend. “And do you expect your sparkmate to be able to handle sitting in a room with him for that long?” Or really if the other could handle sitting still in a room that long, period. He had come a long way since joining the Autobots, but Blaster still got a kick out of how much the mech just had to *move*. It was like he had excess energon in his tanks he just had to burn off or risk purging almost all of the time.

“Prowler is sending ‘im over.” Jazz grumbled some, crossing his arms over his chest. “*I* could handle this.”

Blaster waved his jealous friend off with a roll of his optics. “We all know ya can, Jazz. This is more so to widen their understanding of the world a bit, y’know? They lived with Shockwave most a’ their lives before this. And since they got here, they’ve mostly just stayed on base, right?” Not that a bunch of mechs didn’t rotate through the Autobots’ central command base, but they all knew that grunts didn’t have time for mechlings. Especially *these* mechlings. What they knew

about the world post-Shockwave was not as much as it could be. Blaster wanted to change that.

Who better than the only mech amongst the Autobots' not from Cybertron to help with that?

As if summoned by the mere thought of him, a flash of baby blue flew by the twins on the track. Both skid to a screeching halt, transforming and tumbling over each other to keep from crashing. Blaster chuckled some as they both began swearing, earning a "language!" from Jazz. That got him two extremely offended glares and one indignant yelp as Sunstreaker shoved his twin off of him. "Who is that?!" Sunstreaker called, leading the way towards Jazz and Blaster from the track. Blurr passed them expertly a couple times in the process, earning a sharp glare each time from both younglings.

With a soft chuckle, Jazz pointed towards the track. "That, ma mechs, is Blurr. Very properly named. Just got back from a mission running intel between us and the Wreckers."

"*He* is an intelligence officer? He is barely older than us!" Not that either of them were jealous. Both were much too flashy for intelligence work. But Blurr was never still, moving faster than either of them really thought possible. And he was almost as brightly colored! How could a mech like *that* be in the intelligence division?

"He's older than he looks, mechlin's." Jazz chuckled some, nodding over to where Blurr sped around the track by himself. "He used to be a racer, from one of the colony planets. Velocitron. Supposedly, he was the fastest there, so he came here on a shuttle to race us instead. Still the fastest. Never lost a race."

Sunstreaker scowled, glaring some at the streaks of blue on the track. "And that counts as qualification to be an intelligence officer how?"

"If he pushes it, mechs can't see him 'cause he is so fast. We use him to get an idea of base layouts and enemy numbers or get messages to allies when comms are down." Jazz explained, actually startling Blaster some. "Lot quicker than sending me or 'Raj, that's for sure."

"'Raj?" Sideswipe asked curiously, his twin's field mimicking his own curiosity. "Who is that?"

"This slagger's second-in-command." Blaster shot Jazz a quick look before turning to the twins. "Mirage is a bit of a stuck-up pain in the aft, but also happens to be Jazz's *other* best friend. Besides myself and

OP.”

“I resemble that remark,” came the light-hearted tone of Mirage, right before shimmering into existence before the twins' optics. Sideswipe nearly fell on his skidplate, stumbling backwards from the new light blue mech, while his older twin just eyed the newcomer up and down. Almost like Sunstreaker was trying to size the mech up. “Pleasure to meet you both, younglings. I hear you've tamed our dear medic and Wheeljack. A real feat, if you ask me.”

“Where the frag have you been hiding these mechs?!” Sideswipe asked, optics flickering about him as he places a hand over his hammering spark. “There isn’t anyone else that can do that, is there? Invisible mechs. Slag, maybe Shockwave wasn’t wrong.”

“Autobots are crazy,” Sunstreaker finished, one corner of his lips quirking up the tiniest bit, though.

. . .

Ratchet was surprised to get a notification that someone was at the door of their quarters as they were all starting to settle down for the night. First Aid was in charge of the medbay at the time being, and he knew the mech would not leave his post. He opened the door with a scowl, ready to chase a mech away, but stopped when he saw Jazz. The mech’s posture was not right. He seemed worried, extremely so. Even if Jazz ever had been worried around Ratchet, he *never* let it show. You never felt the other’s field, except perhaps Prowl, his twins, and Bluestreak. Ratchet imagined Prime and Blaster may have as well; the two had known the mech since before the war. “Jazz?” He could not find the words to ask what was wrong, did not think he needed to ask. Jazz would tell him.

“Can I come in? I need to tell ya about ‘Raj’s last mission.” His voice was low and soft, as if he did not want other’s to hear him. “Mech to mech. This…” He shook his head.

A Jazz at a loss for words was not a good one. The medic stepped aside quickly, just standing there as Jazz slipped passed him and into the main room. He heard Sideswipe and Sunstreaker’s tired greetings and Wheeljack’s chipper hello. Jazz was polite with his own greeting, asking the younglings how the rest of their orn had gone and making polite conversation. He was not in it, though. Both ‘Jack and Ratchet could tell, his sparkmate’s unease coming through the bond. Ratchet pulled himself from the door, forcing his frame to take him back into

the main room and sit near ‘Jack and the twins.

He pulled in a deep vent before finally asking. “What happened on ‘Raj’s mission, Jazz?”

“He found some recordings. Of their fights.”

The twins closed themselves off immediately, their fields suddenly pulled tight to their frames. It was like they had entirely vanished from Wheeljack and Ratchet's sparks. They pressed themselves into each other as much as physically possible, shrinking away from Jazz. A firm hand on Ratchet's thigh was all that stopped him from chasing the mech out of their quarters. The twins *did not* need to know this. They did not need to see these recordings. No one did. Those recordings needed to be deleted from existence. Ratchet could not believe that Jazz would bring this up with the twins present; he had thought the other cared enough to realize that would do nothing other than set back any of their recent progress.

“Leave.” Ratchet settled for, not rising and disturbing their younglings anymore. “Leave and get rid of them. Now.” He wanted to throw things, to chase Jazz out even if the mech was his friend. His twins did not need this. He did not need this.

[One of them is *their* fight, the one before they came here. I don't think they need to see it. But you do, Ratchet. Already shown it to Smokey, too.] Jazz answered quickly over a comm channel with Ratchet and ‘Jack. The scientist was up in an instant, startling the other two before he was snatching the twins up by their hands and going to their room. He did not want to see it either, Ratchet could feel that. He did not blame the scientist. Ratchet had seen the scars and the damage to Sideswipe when he came to the bots, had heard Jazz's reports on Sunstreaker’s battle protocols from training. They already *knew* what happened. None of them needed to see it to know how bad it was.

Seems he did not have a choice, though, if Jazz thought it was important enough to bring it up. He let out a sigh, holding a hand out to Jazz. “I will watch them. When I am ready.”

A datachip was placed delicately in his hand. “You know I wouldn’t bring this up if it didn’t seem… important. Especially to understanding Sunstreaker, and that profile.”

Ratchet knew that. It did not mean he was happy about it either way.

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

> I am so, so sorry in advance. You'll know why I am apologizing soon. (Also, anticipate more time hopping now that we have reached this point. I do my best to make it obvious. Please let me know if I need to clarify it more in future chapters.)

“A fight… to the death!” Shockwave called out, earning a loud uproar from the crowd. The twins did not share their excitement, both casting startled looks at their carrier.

They were just younglings – barely, at that. They were so small, blasters almost too big for their hands. Ratchet's spark nearly called out for theirs, needing to check on them. He knew they were safe; he knew how this fight ended. They would come to him after this, and he would keep them safe. This was all in the past. Their little frames quivered, Sideswipe clinging to his twin. Sunstreaker did a slightly better job of holding it together, glaring up at their carrier with all of the rage and loathing he could muster. “We aren’t fighting!” He yelled out.

“You’ve long outlasted your usefulness, youngling.” Shockwave snarled, leaning down some as the crowd roared around him. “Failed test subjects, the both of you. You’ll fight, or I’ll let another failure in to tear you both to shreds. Don’t keep the crowd waiting…” He leaned back some, snapping his fingers so a counter appeared above the arena.

“Fight me.” Sunstreaker whispered, just barely audible to the cameras.

Sideswipe shoved the other away, expression a mix of anger and offense. “No! I won't! We- we’re *twins*. I won’t kill you! I can’t!” Even still, he brought one blade free, just as his twin did the same. He did not want this, but what choice did the twins’ have? Sunstreaker moved first, firing a shot to one side of the red twin before moving in to swipe his blade at the other side. He nicked the other along both forearms, starting scars that Ratchet had become very familiar with by now.

“We could be free of here! Fight me!” He yelled, bring his blade down again. Sideswipe blocked the attack, but only just. Staggering backwards, he had to block hit after hit after hit. He was slowly being

pushed back, his own refusal to strike back losing him ground.

“I-I don't wanna die!”

Another blocked hit from Sunstreaker. “And I don’t wanna die at anyone else’s hands!” Ratchet saw how Sideswipe’s entire frame locked up briefly at his brother’s declaration, letting the other get in a quick slash to his side. He stumbled back to clutch at his side, staring at the other. “Don’t let them kill us.” Sunstreaker whispered. “Let’s- we’ll put on one last show, okay?”

A tiny, sad head shake. “I don’t want to.”

He could make out the yellow twin’s somber expression, taking several steps back. Sideswipe did the same, his own movements much shakier. “We don’t have a choice.”

And just like that, the twins clashed to the roaring cheers of the crowd. Over and over again, they threw themselves at each other. It did not take long before they were both dripping energon from various places, covered in cuts. Sideswipe was in obviously worse shape, movements getting sloppier and sluggish the longer it went on. Not Sunny, though; it was like he was possessed. He was an unstoppable force. Sideswipe was unfortunately not an immovable object. If they were not in the other room, he would see only one outcome to this fight: two dead younglings, and a very empty life for him. Even if he would not have known it.

Ratchet’s spark began to pound when Sideswipe fell back across the arena and stood there. Sunny was charging forward in an instant, and even from this angle he could practically feel Sideswipe's anxiety through the recording. He was so focused on Sunstreaker's unrelenting charge that he did not notice the blaster fire until it hit the yellow twin in his right shoulder. It caused him to stumble some, looking to the burn from the plasma blast. Red optics turned from the burn to Sideswipe, who still stood quivering and holding the blaster. Something was off. That look was not Sunstreaker.

It was that profile. Even then.

Sunstreaker charged forward anew, continuing against Sideswipe’s blaster fire. Nothing stopped the charge, and Sideswipe would not aim for anywhere that could kill his twin. The blaster was ripped from his hands and tossed aside like nothing before the same fate befell him as well. The crowd was screaming in delight, cheering them on. Yellow hands wrapped around Sideswipe's throat, choking him and hovering

over his now prone form. Ratchet's spark raced just watching, having to keep the twins' vitals up on his HUD as he forced himself to keep watching.

“S-Sunny- stop-" Sidedwipe clawed at the other weakly. “*Hurts*. Su-“ The other youngling’s voice gave out. His optics started to flicker. If Sideswipe were not sitting in the other room that very moment, Ratchet would fear for the worse. He knew how this ended, had heard vague retellings of it. He did not want to see it but found he could not turn it off.

Like a switch was suddenly flicked, Sunstreaker just let go. His back went ramrod straight, optics flickering around. He looked so lost and confused. He looked *in pain*. Ratchet could just barely catch the quiver of Sunny’s hands as he looked down to them and his nearly in stasis twin. Then the switch was flicked again, and Sunny was in motion. He was pulling Sides up and firing shots into the crowd before flinging the blaster aside and making a break for it.

That was all Ratchet needed to see. He knew the story from there very, very well.

. . .

He could not stop himself from hovering around the twins, having a rare orn off line up with their training schedule. ‘Jack opted to do more theoretical work from their quarters that orn, having set up in the main room with all sorts of holo-displays around. Sideswipe was enthralled with it all, staring down every bit of math and design specs floating around him. It made Ratchet’s hovering easier, with Sideswipe glued to Wheeljack’s side.

Sunstreaker was determined to not be hovered over, it seemed. He had locked himself away in his studio, and gave nothing but short, one- to two-word answers. Want Energon? No. We might get out a board game in a bit? I’ll pass. The youngling had not been so shut off and short with them in so long. Ratchet was struggling with finding what to do to get him out. He was not as easy to bribe into coming out as his brother. So, there was only one thing Ratchet could do after lunch time rolled by and Sunstreaker had still not exited.

He had to be honest.

“I watched it.” Ratchet whispered, leaning against the wall next to the door. “I watched and just- I need to know you’re okay. Please. I know that happened so long ago, and I know all of those injuries-“ His voice

glitched out momentarily, stopping in his throat. His sparkrate was steadily rising, much to his own displeasure. “I just need to know you are alright. Please, Sunshine.”

The sound of the door opening was so beautiful. There he stood, his stubborn eldest youngling. His face was tearstained, but Sunstreaker still wore a scowl. “My name isn’t Sunshine. You know that.” His chin quivered the tiniest bit, and Ratchet could not stop himself from hugging the youngling. (When had Sunstreaker grown to where he could rest his head on Ratchet’s shoulder? Where had his sweet little younglings gone? He was still thin and lithe, not having to grown into his height like his twin just yet, but Primus, it hurt to wonder where the time had gone.) “Are you going to kick me out now? Send me to the ‘Cons?”

Ratchet lets out a wet chuckle, ignoring his own tears bubbling up now. “Oh, I think ‘Jack would kill me if I tried to, don’t worry about that.” He can feel Sunstreaker’s laugh, although it quickly dissolves into more tears and sobs. Ratchet held him close, dismissing the concerned probing from Wheeljack. Undoubtedly, Sideswipe would show up shortly and join the huddle. Wheeljack would follow. “You know I’m not letting you go anywhere. I’ll fight anyone who tries to take you from me. And I’ll win.”

A light thunk against his back as more small arms wrap around him. (He knew it would happen.) “You’re not a good fighter, Ratchet.” Sideswipe whispered into his back.

“We’ll keep you safe, though.” Sunstreaker tacked on.

They definitely could, if they wanted to. Ratchet knew this; everyone did. But he did not want them to worry about him. Not now, or ever, really. They were still just younglings and would eventually have their own lives to be concerned with. “I assure you, I’m a better fighter than you think I am.”

Wheeljack’s field meshed with his own before Ratchet found himself further buried in a pile of his little family. “Besides, everyone knows not to mess with the scary old Hatchet, even ‘Cons.”

“You are lucky I am trapped between two younglings, or I’d leave you a few good dents to remind *you* of that.” Ratchet grumbled. There was no true malice to his voice, especially not with the bright little bits of laughter coming from in front of and behind him. ‘*You’re just getting on my nerves to cheer them up.*’ It worked, even if Ratchet found it mildly

annoying. He could not be that angry at something that brightened the mood so easily, though. They all finally broke up, Sunstreaker following them into the main room. He was still not in the best mood, but Ratchet could deal with a grumpy Sunstreaker to ease his own worries.

. . .

Four orns later found Ratchet on edge again. He wanted to just run and take his younglings away, hide them from any threats. The current threat just so happened to be Prowl, who Ratchet had assumed would never be a threat. “Absolutely not.” Ratchet growled, practically climbing across the meeting table to strangle Prowl. The SIC had the *audacity* to suggest that the twins be allowed into battle 4 vorns early. Worst part was that Ratchet was the only one actively telling him to go and shove lead down his intake. “Over my cold, sparkless *frame*, will those younglings enter battle earlier than anyone else. I don't care how well their training is going, or how experienced they may already be. No.”

“We are *losing* and they could help us turn the tides of this war.” Prowl said, voice level and optics the only thing giving away his annoyance with the medic.

A fist slammed down on the table as Ratchet stood. “So, when Fire and Storm are old enough, you won't keep them from going into battle? Because it isn't like the Autobots have many fliers. They could help us win.” His voice is dripping with sarcasm, frame practically shaking with his anger.

“I won’t, because I know that we need them, and by then it will be *their* choice.” The calm, crisp edge was gone now; Prowl was getting *emotional*. “If I thought there was any other way to shift things significantly, I would not suggest this, Ratchet. But I ran *almost a million* possible simulation. Nothing helps as much as they do.” Prowl's usually composed doorwings were strained back, his field uncontrolled enough as well for everyone to feel his fear and anxiety. It was his job to think of every possibility. *Every. Single. One*. To run it through his cursed battle computer and experience every possible outcome. Prowl never suggested things this drastic unless there was no other feasible option.

“I'm a creator myself, Ratchet, just like you pointed out. I don't like this at all. You must know that. Do you think I didn't struggle with? I look at your twins and am reminded very much of my own, of what

they will probably one day choose for themselves. And it terrifies me." When the time came, his own younglings would likely have to go into battle as well, had realized it the second he saw their adorable little wings. His youngest brother would be finishing battle training and receiving his own upgraded armor soon enough. So, he could not blame Ratchet for his anger. If any mech there understood it, Prowl *did*. He takes a long moment, watching Ratchet practically shake with rage, to compose himself. "I like *nothing* about this. You *have* to know this, Ratchet. But there is no. Other. Way."

Ratchet would not give in, though. Not with his remaining time with his twins being relatively safe at stake. "They're just younglings."

Prowl stood now, slamming his own fist down on the table and startling everyone else in the meeting. "Not anymore. Take my own brother for example; Bluestreak is an excellent sniper. Best we've seen in a long time. And your twins? They give the Wreckers a run for their money. And they all *want* to fight. They want this to end just as much as we do." Perhaps more so. Bluestreak barely remembered life before the Decepticons, and the twins never knew anything else. "You can't protect them forever, Ratchet. None of us can."

"They still have four vorns. Just wait four more vorns," He was begging now. Just let him keep his sweet younglings for a little longer. Ratchet was not ready to risk losing them any more than he already had. "Legally, they can't make that choice yet. You know it."

Prowl seemed almost ready to cave to all the mechs around him. He could not, though. Their very way of life – or what remained of it – was at stake. They *needed* the twins for their next push, or they would lose all of Iacon. He shook his head, feeling his spark ache at the droop to Ratchet's posture. "If we wait four vorns, we'll all be dead in approximately ten more. 0.4% chance of success after four vorns. 5% at three. 10% at two. A measly 11% at one vorn. We have a 45% chance of winning the war without the twins in this next battle. Our chances go up to 88% with them."

It still amazed Prowl how two younglings could make such a change; they were not Prime or Jazz, who had become figureheads of their movement. It was very rare to have random mechlings such as their selves make such a difference. None had since Hot Rod and Blurr joined the Autobots in the early days. And even they were only a 12% increase together. All of the officers knew this, too. They needed the twins, whether Ratchet liked it or not.

“Permission to return to my quarters, sir?” Ratchet ground out to Prime, averting his gaze from Prowl as he stood up to storm out before Optimus could even whisper out “permission granted.”

Jazz waited until Ratchet left the room before finally speaking up. “I kinda agree with old Hatchet. Those two may be lethal. But their gonna get themselves killed, Prowler.” He ignored the dirty look from his sparkmate as he gestured to Ironhide. “Do you feel they are ready?”

For once, Ironhide did not immediately give his opinion. He stayed silent for a moment, looking around some before shaking his helm. “They're great fighters, but I would not send them to anything massive. Small border skirmishes, but ya don’t wanna just throw those two to the cyberwolves. Those protocols of theirs are… deadly.”

“Especially Sunstreaker's. If they slip, it is like a whole ‘nother mechlin’. He has 0 control in that profile. You saw that footage.” Jazz tacked on, looking pointedly at Prowl. No one on that ship knew profiles as well as Jazz did. Pit, before the twins, he was the only mech in the Autobots with a profile. The other had to respect his opinion on this.

Prowl still surprised him sometimes, though. With a shrug, the tactician simply said, “That is exactly what I am planning for. We need someone who won’t hold back. Who can make the difficult choices, or does not have to. I hope Sideswipe will be able to assist in controlling his brother.” Jazz looked startled by Prowl's admission, pulling his own field tightly to his frame quickly. The praxian vented quickly, letting his doorwings lax some. “It is, however, acceptable to put them on border patrols before sending them into battle. If we make the move for the Science District, though, we *need* them.”

A pang of pain flared through their bond as Jazz got up and just left the meeting, shaking his helm. Sitting there, staring after the other as he retreated and the rest of the officer core continued talking, Prowl thought it may have been from him.

Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sunstreaker did not remember most of their first actual battle. He could tell you all about the preparations, his banter with Sides before it got particularly bad, and all about debriefing after. He did not remember a moment of the actual battle, though. He said that in debriefing, which is why he found himself in the lower levels with Jazz once more, just like during training. Working on suppressing his battle protocols. He did not see a point to it, though. With his battle protocols, he was unstoppable. Sunstreaker was what the Autobots needed, whether they liked it or not.

Other mechs remembered that battle, though. They thanked him, for saving them. Cliffjumper especially had taken a liking to the mechling after fighting by his side. The mech came and sat at his table in the corner of the rec room, bringing Hound along with him. It was startling having mechs actually come up to him and try to be friendly and make conversation. He was not his brother, the social butterfly. Until now, most mechs just thought Sunstreaker was stuck up and arrogant. A bit of an egotist. Which were all valid assumptions. Now, he had mechs coming and wanting to spend time with him outside of training exercises and shifts.

He wished he remembered everything that made these mechs like him so much.

What he did remember with sharp clarity, though, was coming out of the haze he had found himself in to *Bluestreak*. Not his twin, like he anticipated, like he always had before. They were not Sideswipe's hands holding his helm firmly, nor were they his light blue optics he found himself looking into. The field meshing so well with his own was certainly not *foreign*, but not the one he generally looked for when coming out of a haze. Sunstreaker found he did not dislike coming to with Blue just smiling nervously back at him.

“You with me, Sunshine?” Blue had asked softly, voice and field filled to the brim with his nervousness.

Sunny brought a hand over one of Blue's on the side of his helm, not entirely sure how to process this moment, “My name's not Sunshine.”

He whispered softly, spark all a flutter and confusing him. Over their bond, he felt his own twin's surprise, and then startling amounts of joy. Like Sideswipe knew something he did not, understood what he was feeling more than Sunny did.

Those feelings were making it even harder for Sunstreaker to focus on his training with Jazz. The spec ops mech lightly tapped him between his optics, startlingly the young mech into looking up at him. “What's gotcha bogged down, ‘Streaker?”

He vented hard, groaning. “The only other mech who calls me *that*.” He caught the other's amusement in his field and the glint to his visor, causing Sunstreaker to scowl. Jazz did not look at all surprised. “What.”

The mech shrugged, crossing his arms over his chest and leaning back against the wall. He looked positively smug. “Oh, nothing. Just amazed it took ya this long.”

Sunny huffed, glaring at the other in full force now. “This long to what?”

“Realize ya liked Blue.”

“I've liked Blue for vorns.”

“I meant *really* liked Blue.”

“… oh, frag.” Was that what it was? How had Sunstreaker not even noticed? He surely would have noticed his own feelings for the other mech changing *that* much, right? But the odd racing of his spark at just the thought of it was not the one he anticipated, not one caused by anxiety. He knew that feeling all too well. This was still that other, newer feeling.

He was a goner. Absolutely fragged. He did not have the first clue on what he was supposed to do about all of this, because as far as Sunstreaker knew, Bluestreak liked Sideswipe like that but not him. And while triads were not unheard of amongst grounders, Sunstreaker would never want to force his way between his twin and Bluestreak by accident if the other did not want to be in a triad. Was this going to be his life now? Watching those two from afar and feeling impossibly left out?

With a groan, Sunstreaker just let himself fall back on the floor, sprawling out. Jazz chuckled above him before moving to sit next to

him. “Come to comfort me in my time of need? Tell me, ‘oh, well, maybe he’ll decide he likes you too?’ Blue just tolerates me for Sideswipe.” Which really, really sucked now. Primus, why did he have to figure out his feelings? Why could he not have spent the rest of his existence just not even knowing he could be capable of liking a mech other than his twin?

“He does, though.”

That was news to Sunstreaker.

“Have you seen the way the mech looks at you when you are showin’ off a paintin’ or your brother and you are doing somethin’ stupid? You’d think the two of ya hung the moons.” Jazz swatted at him the second Sunstreaker scowled and opened his mouth to speak. “Nope, no arguin' with me on this one, Streaker. I've known the mechlin' since he was *tiny*. I know that look and what it means. He likes ya. Always has. Both you and Sides.”

He did not want to believe it. Which seemed wrong, in a way; that was exactly what he wanted to be true. Nothing could have made Sunstreaker happier at that moment than to know that Bluestreak liked him as well. But what were the odds, really? He could run the numbers himself but did not want to. Sunstreaker did not want to give himself hope. Even if there were a chance, Blue deserved better than him. The praxian deserved a sparkmate who was likely to live through the war. Who did not intend to go out in a blaze of glory much like himself. Blue deserved someone who would be there with him after it all.

“… Don't tell him. Please.” Sunstreaker whispered, avoiding looking at Jazz.

The other mech nudged him in an obvious attempt to get him to look at him. “Y'know I wouldn't. I've never been one to share someone else's secrets. Secrets are kinda my job, after all. But don’t sound quite so sad about findin’ your sparkmate, Streaker. This is a happy moment.”

Was it, though? Sunstreaker does not ask that aloud, but he could not help but wonder. If the circumstances were different, perhaps it would have been. Perhaps he would have been elated and ready to scream his excitement from the rooftops. But they were at war, and he was stuck fighting both ‘Cons and himself at times.

. . .

Sunstreaker approached Wheeljack slowly, field and guardian bond to the other both overflowing with nervousness. The scientist finished his soldering job before setting his soldering iron off to the side and quickly turning it off. He turned to see his youngling pacing a small area in the lab behind him. “Whatcha need, Sunshine?” ‘Jack asked, voice chipper even if his field showed the concern he really felt.

With one quick inhale before and, Sunstreaker just came out and asked it quickly. “How did you know Ratchet was your sparkmate?”

“Oh, is this about Bluestreak?” Wheeljack laughed loudly at the exasperated sigh he got in response. That was answer enough, really.

Sunstreaker threw his arms up, falling on one of the chairs around Wheeljack’s work station. “How does everyone know?”

“Because it was obvious for Sideswipe and has become more obvious with you recently. It's not uncommon for split sparks to have the same sparkmate, or even to be each other's sparkmate.” Wheeljack went to wrap Sunstreaker in a light hug, the other falling into it happily. “Your sparks were one, once. Sharing something like this is fairly common, like I said.”

Sunstreaker shrugged Wheeljack off of him, avoiding the hurt look he just knew the other was wearing. “Can they bond without me?” He asked softly, wringing his hands together. The other's field flared briefly with shock, then shrank back to his frame with sadness. Pity.

A finger under his chin had him looking to his guardian again. Wheeljack's optics pierced into his, making Sunstreaker want to run. All that *worry*, for him. It made his plating crawl. “Why would they need to bond without you, Sunshine?”

Sunshine. That Primus forsaken nickname. He had hated it so much at first, simply because that *was not* his name. But it has been different when Wheeljack said. It had always sounded so loving when he said it that Sunny could do nothing more than grumble at him. Then that slagging Praxian had gone and used it and looked at him like he was not just a ticking time bomb and-

“I don't deserve it.” He finally came out with, spark pounding anxiously in his chest. Sideswipe's worried prodding at him was slowly becoming more apparent, but Sunstreaker pushed him out gently. “They- they deserve better than me. I'm just going to get myself killed one day, ‘Jack. Everyone knows it.”

“If you die, so does Sideswipe.” It was a quick, simple counter. Something that Sunstreaker himself had been reminded of more times than he could count. “They literally could not live together without you. Why bother *not* bonding? Why waste the time you could have together, if you seem so sure you'll die in this war?”

Sunstreaker was silent, not sure how to answer. The scientist wrapped him up tightly, the older twin's head resting on his shoulder. Tears came against his will, but without sobs. Wheeljack was right, just like Jazz had been. He just-

He did not know what to do with all of this. He doubted he ever would.

Chapter End Notes

> Next few chapters are going to... well, I'm just gonna apologize in advance. I do promise there is an eventual happy ending, but not without a WHOLE LOT of torment.

Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

> Quick update beforehand: This chapter does feature a time jump. Ratchet mentions it kinda early on, but wanted to mention it in case people potentially glossed over it. This one is also kinda short because I am still ironing out the next chapter and well... it is a bit of a doozy. So, I figured I would leave you guys this bit for now, to tide you over until I finish the behemoth.

It was funny, watching Ratchet get so flustered. Sides was honestly really enjoying himself, perched on a medberth with Bee beside him giggling softly. The red frontliner always enjoyed Wheeljack's quirky presents on his and Ratchet's anniversary, and this vorn appeared to follow that trend. Sunstreaker had the jet twins draped over his shoulders, almost like extra armor. Both were giggling like mad as he walked around the medbay and they held on for dear life. “Really, Ratchet, this is perfect for the medbay. Or at least your office.” He held the framed painting in front of him, his field radiating amusement as the medic swatted him away.

“How Wheeljack talked you into this, I will never know.” Ratchet grumbled, field held tightly to his frame.

(When had Sunstreaker and Sideswipe gotten *taller* than him?)

“Oh, Jazz offered me some of his high grade if I did it.” Sunstreaker admitted with a bright laugh, grinning. Those were such a rare sight that Ratchet could not help but archive it for easy access later. Sunstreaker looked so *happy*.

Bluestreak finally piped up from where he sat perched on a stool near Sideswipe, doorwings angled in a sheepish manner. “I did try to talk him out of it, Ratch. Unfortunately, Jazz and Sideswipe were working against me.”

And the addition of the third voice had Ratchet's spark settling some, anger lessening. Bluestreak had been around quite a bit when they were younglings, but in the five vorns since the three had officially joined the Autobot forces, he had become a permanent fixture. Bluestreak had been good for the twins, both on and off the field, as much as Sunstreaker may have regretted admitting it at first. The Praxian was the only mech other than his twin that could get

Sunstreaker *settled* after a battle. And to see it, just how tender Sunstreaker could be with the Praxian and how unafraid Bluestreak had become, was a thing of beauty during the war. He knew the other would not hurt him, and it showed. Ratchet awaited the orn that the twins finally bonded with the sniper. It would be an orn to be celebrated by all. If his eldest son could just get his head out of his aft, that is.

“You've got to admit, though, if we weren't in a war, that would be a museum worthy painting.” Bluestreak tacked on, looking at Sunny as he said it. The other mech almost looked flustered, rolling his optics and looking away with the tiniest smile. Neither of them paid Sideswipe any mind, who just beamed at them both with Bumblebee.

Jetfire tapped Sunstreaker's face from his spot on his shoulder, “Can we get goodies now, Sunny?”

“Yeah, you promised!” Storm tacked on, almost pouting. Almost.

Blue was moving forward, snagging each of his nephews from Sunstreaker and setting the younglings on the ground. “You guys made *Sunny* promise? I thought energon goodies were our thing? I’m hurt.” He did his best to look sad and offended, and it may fool the young twins, but the medic just rolled his optics. *Mechlings, the lot of them.*

“But you’re in the barracks now, so we can’t see you as much,” Storm whined, scowling. That had the medic moving, shooing them all from the medbay. He was not about to listen to this. He had *work* to do, whether his own younglings and sparkmate cared to realize it or not. “Aw, Ratchet!” The younger twins fussed, hurrying out after Blue with Bee and Sideswipe anyway.

Sunstreaker did not move, though, simply quirking an optic ridge at Ratchet, still holding that slagging painting. The medic glowered back at him with his arms crossed over his chest. They stood there for a few long kliks before Ratchet threw his helm back with a groan. “Just… take it back to our quarters.” He huffed finally, waving the other away.

“You’re gonna break his spark not hanging it up in here, Ratchet.” Sunstreaker teased some, looking at the painting himself now. “I mean, it isn’t like it is anything graphic. It’s actually really cute, if you ask me.” He held it up higher, grinning some. “I can’t quite remember this; I usually conked out on ‘Jack. But, I mean, he has the capture to

prove it, so it obviously happened." The capture that Sunny had replicated almost perfectly, with the addition of Wheeljack. Like the mech had been there all along, curled up with Ratchet and their twins. Ratchet remembered it actually happening clearly. This had been shortly after Wheeljack had finally moved back into their quarters. The twins had been trying to stay up as late as possible, because 'Jack was on a late shift. They wanted to wait to go recharge, so they could tell him good night. They had passed out with Ratchet in the main room, sprawled out on their couch.

Ratchet sighed, "You've always been stubborn. I had thought Sides was bad when I first met him, but he has nothing on you." He stalked forward and grabbed the painting, ignoring the amusement he felt over the guardian bond. "Are you positive you aren't secretly ours somehow?" It slipped out before Ratchet could stop it. His spark filled with regret immediately, ready for the other to pull away, to run from him. He had not meant it like *that*, he really had not. It just-

Sunny did not run. "I wish." He mumbled instead, shaking his helm. His optics trailed over the painting some, expression carefully blank. "But who knows if we'd even be… *us*, y'know?"

"Your sparks may not have split." Ratchet agreed softly, but he knew what the other really meant. Would they still be *them*, without all the trauma? And Ratchet could not answer that question for him. No one could. But he liked to think that they would. Most of their lives had now been spent with him and 'Jack. They would likely still have been just as intelligent, given Ratchet and Wheeljack's own professions. Probably would still be just as determined, just as willing to help fight. The level of fighting skill they had would have changed, though. There would not have been any dangerous battle profiles. They would have never started training or joined the army early. Pit, Sideswipe may have even chosen to join the Science division with 'Jack if he did not have the crushing fear of becoming Shockwave.

It was all just a bunch of what ifs. Ratchet did not need to dwell on them, shaking his helm some as if to clear it. He moved to settle the painting down on one of the counter tops for the time being. A single finger lingered over the sweet sleeping forms of his younglings. "None of that matters." His whispered. "You're ours. By CNA or not."

A tentative brush of a happy field against his own had him looking over his shoulder. "I know, Ratch." With one last smile, Sunstreaker was gone, likely to chase after his twin and the others. The happy buzz in Ratchet's field remained.

Chapter 22

Battles came and went. With Sunstreaker's profile still not totally in control, the twins were never sent out to the battles further from Iacon. Not that there were many of those happening anymore; the Autobots had moved from trying to gain ground on Cybertron to just trying to keep what they had. Prowl supposedly ran some numbers and decided that was their best chance. Not that Sideswipe or Sunstreaker particularly cared. They just needed to know where and when the next battle was. Plans were not their forte.

Being unpredictable like that largely worked in their favor.

The twins not being sent outside of Iacon meant that Bluestreak was also not sent far from Iacon, as he was generally the one to pull Sunny from the depths of his processor. The sniper did not mind the restriction, though, admitting somewhat shyly that he preferred being near the twins anyway. (And did that not send both of the twins' sparks soaring excitedly, even if Sunstreaker would not admit it.) The yellow twin had rolled his optics at that, nudging the Praxian gently. All he got in response was a gentle smile. Sideswipe did *not* let him live down the way Sunny had suddenly yanked his field in like he had something to hide.

They were both ultimately glad for having Bluestreak with them in battle; the sniper had saved their afts more times than they could count. And they had certainly returned the favor plenty of times. Not that Bluestreak dealt with much being so far out. The battle rarely made it to the sniper.

Unless the Seekers showed up.

It was only Thundercracker and Skywarp at the battle this time, which was both a good and bad sign for the Autobots. Sideswipe did not have time to dwell on where Starscream might be, calling out to any of the Aerialbots nearby for assistance. Him and Sunny – even a practically feral Sunny – could take out the Seekers without any issue. They just needed help getting on their level.

[Did some bot call for pick up?] Powerglide sounded over their comms, getting Sideswipe to start running to the highest point he could reach with his twin hot on his heels. *[Air Raid and I are comin' in hot. Better move quick, mechs!]* Their engines roared overhead as they started to come lower over the fighting, skillfully dodging any stray shots that

came their way.

[It's Jet Judo time, mechs!] Sideswipe called back, picking up speed just in time to launch himself and grab a hold of Powerglide as the mech passed by. His shoulders ached some at the sudden increase in momentum, but he did his beat to ignore it. He sensed Sunny's own discomfort from the same thing over their bond, letting him know his brother was still aware enough to follow his lead. *[I'll snag the loudmouth, Sunny, you take Skywarp.]*

Sunny's snarky reply was pleasantly surprising, *[Loudmouth? I thought Starscream wasn't hear.]*

There was no time for Sideswipe to reply, though, as Powerglide flew in close enough to practically clip the Seeker's wings. He launched himself onto Thundercracker, throwing off the other's flying and nearly sending them plummeting down to the fighting below. “Hey, Thundercraker! Long time no see!”

“Get off me, you pest!” Was all he got in reply as the flyer desperately tried to shake him off. Sides was not going to give, though, shifting his weight forward to start the other in a nosedive. The wind flew by his audio receptors, blocking out any other sound. It was so… *freeing*. He loved this, the feel of the air all around him.

The crash of the Seeker into the ground shortly after he jumped off was also pretty enjoyable. His parachute deployed on its own, safely bring him back to the ground. *[One down.]* He hurried back into the fray of the battle, knowing his twin would likely find him soon. He kept his comms channel turned up, waiting for the other to say anything.

[Sunny’s falling!] Bluestreak's startled call had Sideswipe nearly staggering in battle, barely dodging a late hit from a grunt. *[Looks like his parachute isn't deploying. Air Raid, anyone,* get to him!*]* Sides turned his optics to the sky, looking for the other and-

Skywarp had vanished. And Sunstreaker was falling.

. . .

When Sunstreaker came back to himself, all he could hear was the wind whistling passed his audio receptors, making his frame feel almost weightless. He felt the panic in his spark; both his own and his twin’s. His blaster slipped from his grip, falling with him as if it were racing him to the ground below. It was winning. He tried desperately

over and over again to deploy his parachute, but it would not come. He was going to die. This was it for him.

He had not imagined something like this, if he were honest. Not the ground rushing up and smacking into him so hard his vision blacked out. Not the feeling of his frame cracking almost everywhere. Not the rattle of his processor in his head as it bounced off the ground. Prior to the Autobots, he expected Shockwave to be the end of them. An experiment gone wrong. After the Autobots, he expected to die in the thick of battle. Maybe he would even save a few mechs. Save the day.

“Hey, stay with me, Streaker. Ratch is on his way,” Jazz assured, hovering over the mechling in an instant. Sunstreaker was aware of Sideswipe yelling off to the side but found he could not move to look at him. His whole frame *hurt*, and he just wanted to shutter his optics and go into stasis. Anytime he tried to, though, Jazz was there, shaking him awake again. “Blaster, get Sides outta here!”

Sunstreaker groaned, trying to speak but finding it difficult. He eventually managed it, but almost worried no one would hear him over the chaos. “No… Sides…” He did not want to take his twin from the world with him. Sideswipe deserved to live. They both did.

Jazz shook his head, looking up briefly and appearing to spot something, because he was suddenly moving Sunstreaker. “Sides is fine, we just need him to stay outta the way. I gotta load you up, so Hatchet can get you back to base, ‘kay?” A hand was slipping into his own, “Give my hand a squeeze if you heard me, Sunny.”

He tried but found his body still resistant and more errors popping up. “Can't. Sides.”

“Is fine, sweetspark.” *Ratchet*. Ratchet was there. He could hear him, but found his vision was getting clouded by too many errors to see him. “Load him up *gently*, Jazz. I think he may have an issue with his spinal column, and I would hate anything to potentially separate more than it already is. Quickly, before he slips into stasis.”

“Going quick as I can, Hatchet. The mech got bigger than me somehow. Funny how younglin’s do that, huh?” Jazz grumbled, and Sunstreaker was barely aware of himself being shifted and moved. “Hang tight, Sunstreaker. Ratchet will take good care of you, okay?”

Sunstreaker wanted to insist that he knew that, that Ratchet always had. His processor was becoming bogged down, though, and he found he could not. So instead, he just laid there. It was not like he could

move anyway or wanted to. Everything hurt. He just wanted to recharge, until it was all over. He did not want to hurt anymore.

“Mechling, you stay with me now!” Ratchet called, acutely aware of Sunstreaker's vitals dropping as Jazz loaded him into the trailer. It was no use, though. The mechling was in stasis before he even finished talking. The second he was secured, Ratchet was high-tailing it off the battlefield and back to base. He would not lose his younglings. He could not.

. . .

Wheeljack slipped into the medbay with an energon cube in hand, letting out a soft sigh at his little family there. Sunstreaker was hooked up to so many different monitors but appeared stable. Sideswipe had wormed his way onto the berth with his brother and slipped into recharge finally. It hurt his spark to see the two of them like that, but what made it worse was Ratchet, sitting there like he was guarding them. The medic had not even noticed him enter, though; he had to be exhausted. With soft steps, Wheeljack approached, lightly tapping Ratchet's shoulder. “Ratch, ya gotta refuel. And recharge. You're no help to anyone if you're running on fumes.”

“His self-repair functions aren't kicking in.” Ratchet mumbled, absent-mindedly reaching to his side to take the energon cube from Wheeljack. This was a bit of a routine of theirs when mechs were heavily damaged. Never had it been their own mechlings, though. “I may have to move him to the cryotube. I don't want to yet, though. I’m hoping they'll start up soon.”

The scientist knew the odds of that without asking, though. If they had not already started, they were not likely to. “I can move Sides,” He offered softly. “Set him up next to the cryochamber.”

“Sunny just needs a little more time,” Ratchet insisted, swatting the other away.

His world shifted suddenly as Wheeljack took his helm between his hands, making Ratchet look him in the optics. “Tell me the odds, Ratch.” He flicked his optics away, only to have Wheeljack squeeze his helm a little harder. “Normally, I'd let you do this, but this is *our* youngling, Ratchet. At this point in time, what are his odds outside of cryo?”

The medic snarled at him, “Are you saying I can’t save my own

youngling?"

"There is nothing you can do if his self-repair functions don't start up, and you know it! He could *die*, Ratchet. They both could." Wheeljack's voice dropped out some, letting the medic go and stepping away sadly. "This isn't about you. You've done everything you could, Ratch. I know you have. But… sometimes, it isn't enough. Not alone." A hand softly caressed Ratchet's arm as he looked away. "There's no shame in needing help."

Ratchet knew that, of course. He had been told it time and time again, be it when he was going through schooling to become a medic or any of the times that he worked with First Aid. No matter how frequently he heard it, however, the sting of it did not lessen. He was not good enough, even with his vorns of experience and all of his equipment. He could not save his mechling. Without the cryochambers, there was a large chance that Sunny would die, or Ratchet would spend the next few decaorns fighting to keep him online. Wheeljack was right, as much as Ratchet wished he was not. "I'll transfer him," He whispered after a moment, spark aching. "Go ahead and move Sideswipe."

They shuffled the twins around gently, Sideswipe complaining some but falling back into recharge once he was settled next to Sunny's cryotube. Ratchet continued his vigil, 'Jack joining him. They chatted softly amongst themselves about nothing, obviously just trying to distract themselves from the horrid situation they had found themselves in. It was in that time that Ratchet received an alert that someone was entering the medbay. He looked over to the entrance, seeing an obviously worn out Bluestreak entering the medbay. He did not say a word, moving to just go and outright lay with Sideswipe. The red twin woke up briefly, smiling some before settling back down.

More notifications continued to pop up over the next couple joors, mechs trickling in and joining them there in front of Sunny; Cliffjumper, Hound, Prowl, Jazz, Blaster, Blurr, Mirage, Optimus and Bumblebee, and so many more. Ratchet found his spark aching more now for a different reason. He wished so desperately that Sunstreaker had been awake to see this small army gathering around him now. All he could see was the reserved youngling that had been so scared to leave their quarters or the medbay for a while, who thought he only had – and needed – his twin. *Other mechs care for you. So many more of them than you likely even realize.*

With so many more bots watching Sunstreaker now, Ratchet decided it was time to transfer over care of him to First Aid. He nodded over

to his office to ‘Jack, standing and slowly leading the other there. They could rest easy knowing their younglings were in good hands.

Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

> short update, just cause I've been busy and have not had time to edit more. so here this is in the meantime

Sunstreaker spent three orns in the cryotube before his self-repair systems finally took over. Another orn and Ratchet finally allowed his systems to bring him out of stasis. The first thing he saw was his twin, recharging on top of him practically. Sunny groaned some, reaching a shaky hand to nudge the other. “Ge’ off. You’re gonna smudge my paint.” He grumbled.

Sideswipe did not get off, instead clinging to his twin and crying his optics out for the next joor. The moment he finally let go, he was replaced by Bluestreak, both forcing Ratchet to work around them to check Sunstreaker over. The older twin just let it happen, not really sure of what to say to get them off of him. He honestly was not even sure he wanted them to let go of him. Bluestreak did essentially the same thing when he finally made it into the medbay, although Sunstreaker was thankfully propped up that time. His initial examination did not go as well as Ratchet had hoped, but he knew it could have been worse. His legs were not super cooperative with him, but he was *alive*.

That was all anyone could really hope for.

Other mechs gradually trickled into the medbay to check on him, startling Sunstreaker some but brightening his orn all the same. Was he going to be out of battle for a while? Yes. But it seemed no one was upset with him for it. If anything, everyone was just happy he was up again. None of his damage would be permanent. Sunstreaker would just have a longer recovery time.

. . .

Rehabilitation was a long, painful process. Even more so when the patient was less than cooperative. The cryotube had done a phenomenal job helping along Sunstreaker's repairs, but there were a few complications that Ratchet had anticipated. Much of the connections along his spinal column had been destroyed or severed, and while those repairs were successful, his frame was struggling with the inputs from then still. It was frustrating the warrior, which

resulted in him lashing out occasionally at whatever mech had decided to try and help him.

Most mechs eventually decided to leave rehab activities to Ratchet or Wheeljack. Maybe Bluestreak, but not even Sideswipe was really free from Sunstreaker's rage. Sideswipe was also the only one who really understood it, could feel the sadness and desperation behind that rage. Sunstreaker did not enjoy feeling so helpless and out of control, and Sides could not blame him. It did not mean he enjoyed being snapped at, but he understood it better than anyone.

It was why he had traded with Mirage for a nice can of polish. He had hoped it would help cheer the other up after a long orn of rehab. Sides was running out of ideas to cheer Sunny up if this did not work.

Bluestreak was with him in their room when he found Sunstreaker, the two sitting together on the large berth with a holo-chess set up between them. Sides rolled his optics, “Is this some weird sort of flirting?”

“Yes,” Blue said bluntly right as Sunstreaker also said, “No.” The two looked back at each other quickly, with Sunny scowling and Blue wearing a cheeky smirk. There was nothing more than just annoyance in the scowl, and Sideswipe could feel the stronger wave of embarrassment over the bond.

Another roll of his optics and Sideswipe tossed the polish on the berth. “Just kiss already.” He grumbled playfully, earning a quick kiss on the cheekplate from the Praxian when he joined them. “This is honestly sad. As if everyone doesn’t know what is going on here.”

“Are you trying to tell me to cheat on you?” Sunny joked some, eyeing the can. He reached slowly for it as Sideswipe cuddled up to Bluestreak. His engine purred happily as the Praxian rubbed a hand between his shoulder struts. “Polish?” Sunstreaker looked confused, as if there may be something wrong with the can.

“Yes, polish. Also, it’d only be cheating if you didn’t kiss me, too.” Sideswipe declared boldly, egging his twin on some. Sunny seemed to be in a decent enough mood after physical therapy this orn, though.

His twin sent him a sharp glare at that, field shrinking in around his frame. “*What* are you doing?”

“Trying to get us all on the same page, for once.” Sideswipe countered, leaning away from Blue now. “About the three of us.

Together."

"You almost died, 'Streaker." Blue added, field flaring in sudden sadness.

Sideswipe held a hand up as if to say, 'see?' "Exactly. Why do we need to keep dancing around this? Just… admit it. And we can polish you up all nice and pretty."

Sunstreaker did not respond immediately, staring down at the polish in his hand. His field was still held close to his frame, and the bond was not giving away much to Sideswipe at the moment – on purpose. Here was the offer for something he had never expected. Something he had sworn he did not want. And here he was, trying to talk himself into turning them away. It would be for their own good, after all. Nothing good would ever come from this. They would never get to grow old together, not with this war and their own recklessness. What was the point of a love for only a short time?

But oh, did he want it. He did not want to be alone and getting visited by so many mechs with Blue and Sideswipe at his sides had solidified that thought in his mind. He did not want to be alone, and it seems they both wanted him. *Together*. It was a dream come true. He gave a tiny nod, and Sideswipe gave him an almost predatory smile.

"Well, isn't it perfect that 'Jack and Ratchet are locked in the medbay right now, isn't it?" Sideswipe purred, and Sunstreaker actually feared his twin somewhat there. But aside from that fear was something else, and he was *very* interested in finding out what that feeling was.

Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

Shit is about to go down.

The shift in their relationship was obvious to every mech on base. Where Sunstreaker once attached himself to Sideswipe's side away from Blue when the three of them were around base, many now saw Blue instead walking or sitting between the twins. And looking positively overjoyed to be there, too. His doorwings were always held high and splayed back some, as if to say, "look at me, look what I did." Prowl rolled his optics any time he came across them. Jazz just snorted and would carry on with his orn.

Thankfully not many mechs were very familiar with the intricacies of Praxian wings posture to realize just how possessive the display was.

Sunstreaker was still as grouchy as ever, especially while still going through rehabilitation, but he was significantly less likely to snap if Blue or Sides were around. Cliffjumper was the first to point it out, having gone over to scope out what exactly was going on between the three. He had not heard about any sort of formal arrangement, but he would not be surprised if Bluestreak was significantly less formal than his oldest sibling. Pit, he definitely had to be if he was being so openly affectionate with the twins. The one-time Prowl had rushed to Jazz's side when the mech returned from a mission gone way south almost a vorn behind schedule, the entire base had thought that the world was ending.

They started up a betting pool for a more formal announcement, anyway. It was a much needed distraction from the chaos of the upcoming battle for Tyger Pax.

Sunstreaker was absolutely livid that both him and Sideswipe were being benched for this battle. The Autobots *needed* them, but Prowl and Ratchet both were adamant that he was in no condition to fight, and Sideswipe could not be that far away from him for however long the battle may last. It was a bunch of slag if you asked him, but Sides did not seem to push too much. The younger twin had been kind of antsy about the thought of this new battle. He swore something did not feel right about it.

They were leaving Hound and Mirage at the base, to help Perceptor,

Wheeljack, and Ratchet with the younglings and Twins. Another reason for Sunstreaker to be annoyed; they thought *he* needed protecting. And that he could not look after those he cared about. All because of one little (big, massive, *almost life-ending*) injury. As if he had never had worse, had never caused worse. He did *not* need protection, and they all knew it. He was the one who had to do the protecting. He always had been.

Being doted on made him feel weak, even if Bluestreak and Sideswipe seemed to enjoy doing it so much. Not being allowed to go to the battle for Tyger Pax made him feel even weaker. And he *knew* he was not weak. But there was that little voice in the back of his processor nagging him constantly about it. They need *Hound* to protect you. How does that feel? It would ask. Fragging horrible. He should be out on the frontlines where he *belonged*.

“You belong in recharge.” Sideswipe grumbled in the berth next to Sunny, swatting at his twin. “Stop brooding so loudly. I can’t recharge with you being a brat over the bond.”

Sunny huffed, rolling onto his side with his back to the other. “It’s slag that they’re making us stay here.”

“You almost *died*, Sunny. You need a break.”

“I don’t want one.”

“Should I remind you that I die if you die?” That got Sideswipe a sharp enough shove to send him out of their berth. He scowled some, rubbing at his aft as he stood back up. “It’s amazing *anyone* likes you, you aft.”

Sunstreaker shrugged some, throwing a smirk at his twin as he climbed back in the berth. “You do, although I don’t always know if it is entirely by choice.” He ignored the playful shove that earned him. He had always wondered if these feelings had always been his own, or if they were a result of one of the many experiments Shockwave had done on them since the moment they were sparked. There was no way to really know now.

“You’re so depressing sometimes, I s-“

An explosion rocked the base, sending Sunny and Sides into high alert. The older twin staggered to his feet, legs buckling momentarily but eventually getting them to stay under him. “Where were they going off to defend?”

“Tyger Pax.” Sides answered immediately, slipping his blaster from his subspace.

“A few joors away, right?”

“Yeah.”

“*Slag.*”

They were both leaping into action as alarms started blare loudly throughout the base, Sunstreaker limping some behind his twin as they moved to get to where the jet twins and Bee were sleeping in the main room of Ratchet and Wheeljack’s quarters. The three younglings were looking around confused, all still coming out of recharge, as ‘Jack and Ratchet came rushing out of their room. “Is this some sort of prank?” Sideswipe asked, picking up the two jet twins and passing one them off to Wheeljack and then Ratchet as Sunstreaker hoisted up Bee.

“Red Alert is sending out some sort of code, so I’m thinking this is not a prank. We need to get to Hound and Mirage.” Ratchet said firmly, spark rate through the roof. He reached for Sunstreaker, “Give me Bee. We may need you both with your hands free.” That statement put just how fragged they were into perspective for the twins, since Ratchet had been the main driving force behind Sunstreaker not being allowed on this mission in his current state. If the medic thought they may need to fight, whatever code Red Alert was sending had to be serious.

Sunny passed Bee over quickly, bringing out his blaster and trying his best to stand a little straighter. “Let’s get the younglings to Hound and Mirage.”

. . .

Prowl locked up suddenly, startling his younger brother terribly. Blue was gripping him tightly, shaking some. “Prowl? What's wrong?”

“Transmission from Red Alert. It was a trap.” Prowl whispered.

“A trap? What? Why? Nothing is at the base.” Blue insisted quickly.

Jazz caught on, though, could feel the dread coming from the other's spark. “The twins are.” He muttered, barely stopping a moment before rushing away quickly. Bluestreak and Prowl could take care of themselves, especially with everyone else there. The twins were unlikely to be able to hold off Shockwave and whatever he brought

along for very long. Not with Sunny still recovering.

Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

... yeah, I'm sorry about this one. And the next several.

Jazz found Blaster first, having the communications officer send out a message to the troops they could stand to lose at this battle. The ‘Cons were not truly trying to win this push, so he had him withdraw Cliff, Ironhide, Blurr, and Hot Rod. Not nearly enough to take on an entire army, but he hoped that they would not need to when they made it back to base. “Send the rest after us as soon as you can.” He ordered, moving to speed off back to Iacon with the others.

Not far out from the battlefield, Bluestreak caught up to them, saying simply that Prowl did not need him. It was unsurprising to have him join them; his future trine mates were back at base, after all. Along with Jazz and Prowl’s own sparklings and Bumblebee. Tyger Pax would have been the more obvious choice for the Decepticons to go after, the seemingly more advantageous one. But going after the younglings and taking back the Twin Terrors? That would be the worst blow of all. Which is why Jazz would have rolled his optics if he could in his alt mode when Optimus also caught up to them. Any other time, the saboteur would have teased his old friend, if only just to lighten the mood somewhat. He could not think of a joke or old story to bring up that could possibly cheer anyone up at that time, though.

They made the drive in record time, picking up an encrypted transmission from Mirage as they drew closer. Jazz had them all changing their course slightly, heading to the location the other said they were hiding in. He nearly threw out his t-cog with how quickly he transformed and rushed into the cave to find his younglings with his best friend, both crying softly and clinging to him tightly. Optimus was scooping Bumblebee up off to the side as the others spoke with Hound, Mirage, and Red Alert.

“Where are Sunny and Sides?” Blue whispered softly, looking around the cave.

Mirage looked to Jazz before answering, “They haven’t made it out yet, as far as we know.”

. . .

Of course, Mirage found them not far down the hall from their quarters, appearing suddenly and nearly getting shot by the twins. He held his hands up, looking about some. “Just me, mechs. I’m here to get you out of here. Hound is getting Red Alert and Percy now.”

“Take the younglings.” Ratchet said, moving to pass tiny little Bee to Mirage. Jetfire and Jetstorm both flew over to each perch over a shoulder. “You can’t possibly get all of us out with your mods. Take the younglings. We’ll meet you at the rendezvous point.” The spy thankfully did not argue. He gave them a determined nod before vanishing from sight once more. Sunny and Sides shared a look, both feeling a little more at-ease with the younglings safe. They just had to get themselves, Ratchet, and ‘Jack out. Easy. They knew this base like the back of their hands, and advantage no ‘Con could possibly have with how obsessive Red Alert was about security. Even with Sunny still recovering, they could do this.

They had to.

“Stay behind us.” Sides said quickly as he finally let his battle protocols boot up. His was a less noticeable change than Sunny’s; anyone nearby could hear his self cooling system kick into overdrive, but other than that, there were no tells. Sunny was another story. His entire posture changed, and his optics seemed to somehow focus on everything at once. The very air around him seemed different. He at least seemed to still be mostly in control, though, which was all any of them could ask for at the moment.

“If we say run, you run, got it?” The yellow twin said to their guardians, ignoring the scowl he got from Ratchet.

Wheeljack placed a hand over the medic’s mouth to silence him before he could complain. “Gotcha. Lead the way.” He ignored the pure anger coming off Ratchet in waves, removing his hand to take one of Ratchet’s in it as they moved after the twins. Injured or not, they both knew that they would only get in the way if they tried to help Sunny and Sides in a bad situation. The twins were the better fighters, whether Ratchet wanted to accept that fact or not. They were not younglings anymore.

Sunstreaker led them on a slightly longer path to the lower level exit of the base, both twins swiftly dispatching what few ‘Cons they encountered. It seemed suspicious almost, how easy it was. *These* were the Decepticon troops to finally break into the Autobots’ stronghold? Something had to be wrong, because Red Alert’s security measures

had always been top of the line. No one could get through them, not even Jazz or Mirage. Yet the base was now swarming with a bunch of grunts that Ratchet and Wheeljack could have both handled easily.

None of their current situation sat right with Sunstreaker, and he could tell over the bond that his twin felt much the same. They needed to get out of the base as quickly as possible, before things went any further south.

The rear hangar exit at the bottom level of the base was a sight for sore optics when they finally reached it. Sideswipe let out an excited cheer, charging forward quickly as the other three fell behind some. He had almost made it to the controls for the large hangar door when the distinct sound of blaster fire had him skidding to a stop. There was screaming behind him, from Ratchet and Sunstreaker; the latter sounded both enraged and terrified, but from their bond Sideswipe could tell that he himself had not been hit. Ratchet? 'Jack?

"Hello, my younglings. My, has it been a long time." Chills ran up his spine as many of his systems locked up involuntarily in his panic.

Shockwave.

His feet moved of their own accord after he slammed the button to open the hangar door, skidding down to Wheeljack's side with Ratchet and Sunstreaker. He had taken a shot to his left shoulder, energon pouring from the large hole angrily. His hands shook as they hovered over it, unsure what to do. All his processor would supply was *runrunrunrunrunrunrunrun*, but he could not. Not now, with Ratchet and Wheeljack and Sunstreaker there. The large purple mech took a threatening step towards them all, and Ratchet was up in an instant and snarling.

"I want what is mine," Shockwave stated simply, cannon pointed directly at Ratchet's spark yet the medic did not seem even the slightest bit intimidated. In fact, the medic readied a blaster of his own, engine revving angrily in response as he continued to stand between the 'Con and the twins.

"They are *mine*."

"Ratchet, just- let us go," Sunstreaker begged, Sideswipe shaking but nodding beside him. "W-we aren't worth it. We'll go." It hurt to do, but this is what any Autobot would do, right? Sacrifice yourself for the greater good? For those you loved? It hurt, but they could not let anyone die for them. Especially not Ratchet.

The medic glanced back at them briefly, shaking his helm. “No.”

“Ratchet, you'll die! He-he already hurt ‘Jack. *Please.*” Sunstreaker yelled this time, tugging on their guardian by his arm. The medic would not budge, though, standing his ground as Shockwave chuckled before them. “We aren't worth it! We'll… we'll go!”

Ratchet looked back them to snap at them. “I will *not* give you up. Over my cold, sparkless frame will you go back to *him*.”

“That can be arranged, medic.” Shockwave growled lowly while Sunstreaker and Sideswipe tried to process that all. They had to get Ratchet and ‘Jack to safety, while also taking out Shockwave. Much, *much* easier said than done. But if Ratchet would not let them give themselves up, then there was no other choice. They shared a quick look, nodding to each other as they came to the same conclusion.

There was no other way to get them all out.

“Not- an ideal testing environment,” They all heard Wheeljack mumble suddenly, causing the other four mechs in the room to look at him. There he lay, holding… something he seemed to have pulled from his subspace. He pressed a flashing green button on the device. “Boom.” He whispered.

The following explosion flung them all away. It bathed the hangar in flames as it brought much of the structure around them down. Sideswipe landed atop Ratchet some feet away, thankful that the force of it had not knocked him out. He shoved himself up off the medic as flames from the explosion began to spread around them, collapsing the ceiling above in on them in some places. He did not see Shockwave anywhere. Or Sunstreaker. That had his sparkrate rising in a panic, trying to probe the bond for the other. He could tell he was alive, but he could not *see* him. “Sunny! *Sunstreaker*!” He called, rushing towards a portion of the wreckage where beams from the ceiling now formed a sort of archway where they had hit the floor. “*Sunstreaker!*”

“Oh, hush, you drama queen.” The yellow twin grumbled from where he was slowly pushing himself up out of the wreckage. Sideswipe nearly sobbed in relief when he saw the other stand. He was alive and able to move. “Where is Ratchet? Is he okay?”

“He’s fine! Knocked out, but seems fine. Is ‘Jack over there somewhere?” Sideswipe asked, moving towards the other now. Another blast from elsewhere in the base had them both stumbling,

looking around.

“G-get Ratchet out!” Sunny yelled across the wreckage, nodding over his shoulder. “I'll get ‘Jack. He has to be over here.”

Sideswipe looked back across the wreckage, unable to move or speak momentarily. There Sunstreaker stood, framed by rubble and flames. It really made his paint job glow. This could be the last time he saw him, Sides realized. This could be how they finally die. In a literal blaze of glory, in Sunstreaker's case. Saving Ratchet in his own. At least Shockwave could never get his claws on them again. In death, they would finally be safe.

With a steadying vent, Sideswipe held out a shaky fist to his brother, waiting for the other to bump it with his own. “I'll see you on the other side.”

With a small smile, Sunny nodded back. “See you on the other side.” He slammed the bond shut as he turned to get Wheeljack. There was no time to look back. ‘Jack's life depended on him.

Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

> Merry Christmas, I guess. I have some more writing to do on the next chunk, though, so don't expect as speedy of an update for the next chapter.

The klik that the explosion went off, Bluestreak was running. His spark pounded beneath his chestplate, feet moving on their own as he moved out of the cave that the Autobots had dug for emergencies like this. Blurr was unfortunately quicker than him, knocking him back on his aft before the mech even noticed him move. Hot Rod moved up next to his friend, scowling as he watched the building go up in flames. Blue could just barely make out him muttering, “why is it always fire?”

“You’re not equipped to go in there, mechling.” Blurr stated quickly, slowly pulling Blue up with a firm grip around his wrists. “Wait. They could still make it out. Don’t underestimate those twins of yours, or Ratchet for that matter. They’re strong mechs. They’ll make it out.”

Hot Rod took a few steps further out of the cave, sighing. “I can go in if Inferno doesn’t make it soon. I’ve got enough upgrades to keep me cool for long enough to be able to probably find them.” He definitely did not seem very enthused by the idea but had that same resigned look that many of the Bots often saw on Optimus, or Ultra Magnus. Bluestreak saw the mech’s friend roll his optics as Hot Rod looked over his shoulder. “What? I’ve done it before.”

“Not on purpose, you dumbaft.” Blurr grumbled, loosening his grip some but not enough for Blue to escape. “They’ll get out of there. It’s the twins.”

. . .

After shutting off all of his pain receptors, Sunstreaker moved further back into the wreckage and flames. Wheeljack had *been* the epicenter of the explosion, so it made sense that he would have to trail further back in. Ratchet would likely give him a lecture to end all lectures over turning off his receptors, but he could not worry about that now. He needed to be able to maneuver properly to get through all of the wreckage, and he would not be able to do that wincing every time he contorted his body in a slightly strange manner. The chewing out later

would be worth it if he could get ‘Jack out of there.

He did not have to move much further back before he found ‘Jack; what he could see of him, anyway. Most of the mech was buried under rubble, and what was not was laying in a pool of his own energon that sizzled in the flames. Sunny was rushing forward, trying to shove the large chunks of metal and stone off of his guardian with all of his strength. It was unfortunately not as much as it used to be, though, even with his pain receptors off. His frame was still extremely weakened, and he could barely get it to shift for all of the effort he put into it.

“Sunshine,” ‘Jack whispered softly, snapping his attention from the rubble. The older mech’s optics had a soft look to them, one hand stretched towards Sunny. “Don’t… don’t worry about all that.” Each move of his arm had more energon gushing from the lines in it, startling the mech into action. Upon closer inspection, it was not just his arm. It was his *everything* essentially. Sunstreaker was panicking, hands covered in bright blue energon as he tried to stop it all. He could not do this. He was not the gentle one, the one that fixed things; all Sunny could do was *destroy*. And Sides was out of the base with Ratchet, unable to help because Sunny refused to open their bond right then. Fire was burning angrily all around them, inching in closer and closer as time passed, and Sunny could do nothing but stare down at his energon soaked hands as Wheeljack bled out before him. He could not move the rocks to free him, or stop his bleeding. They were both going to die.

And Sunny found that he did not want to die. He was happy, had been for vorns now. They had a family, as dysfunctional as it was a times. They had gotten the chance to be younglings, with all the pros and cons of the experience. They were not just fighters, not anymore. They were Ratchet and Wheeljack’s mechlings. They were the Twin Terrors, in a much less destructive sense. They got into trouble and pulled pranks and *lived,* and *Sunny did not want to die*.

“Hey, it’s gonna be okay, Sunshine.” Wheeljack’s voice was soft, so soft and so unlike him. Wheeljack was loud, happy. He was not meant to be mellow and bleeding out there in the ruins of their base. His hand rested lightly on Sunny’s, squeezing just barely and the golden twin could not find it in himself to complain about the nickname. Not with how dim Wheeljack’s optics were, or how hot his arm was against his form now. “It’s gonna be okay, son.”

Son. Sunstreaker did his best to choke back a sob at that, not even

close to succeeding. “You’re dumb and optimistic.” There was no bite to his voice, though, just a quiver to match that of his hands. “S-sides should be the one here. He- he could save you. I can’t stop it. I-I can’t do anything but *break* things.” And was that not the worst part, as Sunstreaker clutched Wheeljack’s hand like a lifeline as the fire licked at his armor and warnings flared to life all across his vision. Back with Shockwave, when their lives were Pit and they wanted to die, he was the “better” twin. He was the one that was praised and doted on, as much as Shockwave doted on anything. Yet, here, where they were both happy and healthy, he was the troubled twin. He was the one that seemed to struggle to get things right. However, Ratchet and Wheeljack loved him all the same. There was no contest for affection with the two of them. There never had been, and he knew there never would be if they made it out of this.

Wheeljack laughed some, making Sunny scowl. “The fire will… take care of things. It’s hot enough to seal my wounds. I-I’ll live.” The scientist offered Sunny a grin, but the other was not entirely sure he believed him. It would not be the first time he was lied to about something just to get him to go along with it all. “G-go over there. That slab of rubble should shield you from any damage if anything else falls. R-ratch’d kill me if you got anymore hurt for trying to save my dumb aft.”

“I’m not leaving you!” It came out immediately, sounding whiny and childish but Sunny could not find it in himself to care. He would not just leave Wheeljack there to die. He refused.

The inventor shoved at his hands, the motion barely noticeable. “Go on, you fool. You aren’t leaving me. I’ll still hold your hand even, Sunny. Just… it is safer over there, okay? Please. I’d never be able to live with myself if you got anymore hurt than you already are.” Another gentle shove, and the inventor’s eyes got desperate. “The temperature over here is getting *way* too high, Sunny. Please. J-just go over there and go into stasis. Ratch’ll get to us before you know it, and he’ll get us all fixed up, and we can go right back to game night. Okay?”

No, no it was not okay. It was most definitely not okay, because this all seemed so much more like a goodbye than a see you later to Sunstreaker. He did not want to lose Wheeljack. He did not want to die. He wanted this all to just *stop*. He had wished that they had succeeded in taking Shockwave out all those vorns ago, so that *this* was not happening now. So that Sunstreaker and Sideswipe could have continued their family game night with their creators, or the

mechs they came to consider their creators, instead of Sunny squeezing Wheeljack's hand and pressing their helms together one last time before moving to take cover. He hesitated briefly, staring at Wheeljack as the mech's optics dimmed completely. He forced down another sob, sending himself into stasis mode with a silent prayer that his family was still intact when he came to.

. . .

Sideswipe practically collapsed once they were a safe distance from the fire, barely able to make out the shouts from other mechs approaching them. He ached all over, and he just wanted to rest now. There was not time for that, though, as mechs were pulling Ratchet from him and dragging him up and asking so many questions at once that he just-

Hands on his cheekplates steadied him some, optics focusing in on Bluestreak's timid smile. "Hey there, Sides." The other mech whispered softly, voice quivering. The normally extremely open Praxian has his field drawn close to his frame, not letting any sort of real emotion show in his expression. Sideswipe could not figure out why and could not find it in himself to care at that moment. His arms were wrapping tightly around the other's frame in an instant, careful of his doorwings. This could be his last time getting to hug the other, he realized. He wanted to make it count, had to. Small sobs wracked his frame, but no sound left him. He buried his face in Bluestreak's neck, memorizing the feel of this all while mourning it.

"Sides…?" Ratchet's confused voice carried to him from where Perceptor had been able to get the other back online. Sides pulled back enough to see the mech, spark aching at the lost expression on the medics face. "Where are Sunny and 'Jack?" The moment he voiced the question, a look of realization dawned on his face and he was scrambling to his feet.

Mechs were screaming after Ratchet as he charged into the still blazing inferno, processor focused on one thing; well, two things, in a way. His stupid, stupid sparkmate, and their dumb youngling that had stayed back to try and save him. Arms suddenly wrapped themselves around his torso, snatching him off the ground and charging back out of the remains of their base. He thrashed, trying to break free and hitting any nerve he could reach to try and get them to put him down. They needed him. He *needed* them. He had no clue what he would do without those two- no, *three* troublemakers in his life. "Let me go, you pit-spawned aft!" He snarled. No one would keep him from his family.

No one.

“Ratchet, old friend,” Optimus’ voice sounded so broken, arms around Ratchet tightening more. “I am so, so sorry.”

Ratchet thrashed as hard as he could, needing to break free. “I-I still feel them! They are alive! We need to save them! I *need* them!”

“I-I think Sunny is in stasis.” Sideswipe muttered off to the side, barely loud enough to hear. The youngling had gone completely silent since escaping the base, not even answering Bluestreak. Blue still had one arm wrapped around him, trying to ground the younger twin. “I can feel all of him again. He shut me out. When we got separated. I-if Sunny dies, or gets close to it, we'll know.” The quiver in Sides voice and the dim light of his optics said it all, though.

He did not want to die but had resigned himself to it. The only thing worse than death was life without Sunstreaker; thankfully, that was impossible. “See you on the other side.” He whispered to no one in particular, one fist over his spark. Whether the other side was the well or the Autobot base further in the reaches of Iacon would remain to be seen. Where one went the other followed, always. Little could keep them apart, and not for long. Never for long.

He neglected to consider who was easily able to hear him, though.

White, grey, and red went streaking towards the fire suddenly, Sideswipe only registering just who that frame belonged to because of Jazz sprinting in after him and Mirage shouting for someone to stop them both. *Bluestreak*. His frame trembled, rising to his feet slowly. No, not like this. He wanted to scream, run after them, but found he could not. His systems were slowly shutting down, one by one. Sunstreaker's stasis was finally pulling his spark under as well. He forced all of that aside, trying to delay the stasis as he moved to stagger after them. “B-*Blue*.” He managed two steps before Ratchet snagged him by an arm, hooking into a port quickly and starting to force him under.

“Jazz will get them out of there,” He could hear Optimus say as Ratchet settled down with him on the ground. His guardian hugged him tightly as Sideswipe’s systems slowly cycled down. “They will survive.”

Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

> Hi all! I've got another one-shot for this 'verse coming out soon, probably in the next couple weeks. The next update may take a little bit longer, because I'm starting up classes for my masters soon, on top of working. Bleh. Anyway, I hope you all enjoy!

Hot Rod went in after Bluestreak and Jazz, chasing the two of them back out before going through the burning wreckage himself to haul out first Sunstreaker and then Wheeljack. By the time he was done, much of his paint scheme had been burnt off, but he did not seem at all bothered by it. “Happens with the Wreckers sometimes,” He had said to the three very concerned younglings, trying to help keep them distract from Ratchet working frantically on the Sunny and Wheeljack. He sat towards the back of their hiding spot with them, telling them all sorts of stories from racing to the Wreckers to a mech who was created in fire.

Blaster moved back to sit with them, letting his symbiotes out to help cheer up the younglings. “You’re startin’ to sound more like Kup, mech. Might wanna be careful.” He bumped a shoulder into the other mech teasingly, looking off to where Ratchet was directing Perceptor on how to help stabilize Sunstreaker. “From what I hear, Sunshine over there’ll be alright. Just a little overheated, but nothing too bad. ‘Jacky, though…”

“Wheeljack’ll make it.” Hot Rod said quickly. “Ratchet’s workin’ on him; Ratchet can fix anyone.” The mech had lost count of the number of times that Ratchet had repaired him, especially as he began to experiment with the best ways to stand heat better after joining the Wreckers. Ratchet was a literal miracle-worker, and it never ceased to amaze the speedster that the mech had once been a *senator*. That his entire purpose had not always been to fix things, at least not with his hands.

The medic was an enigma to Hot Rod for a long time after joining the Autobots. He was often prickly at times and seemed to have the worst bedside manner at first. But he had a spark of gold and could talk sense into Unicron himself, if need be. It was just digging under all the layers of annoyance that stopped a lot of mechs from seeing that. It was gradually becoming more evident with the twin terrors around to chip away at it for everyone else, though. Hot Rod was happy to see

it.

It would be sparkbreaking to lose all that progress now.

The Autobots did not get into a proper base again for several joors, forcing them further into the heart of Iacon. Ratchet moved into the designated medbay space as quickly as he could, happy to see cryotubes already set up along with most of the supplies he would need for basic repairs. Alpha Trion's idea, apparently; the mech was scarily prepared at times for the worst disasters. Wheeljack was moved into a cryotube once Ratchet got him stable to help with his repairs, so that the medic could focus on the Twins before the rest of the Autobots made it back or even considering looking at his own injuries. He would get to those later. He just needed to keep himself busy, to keep his focus off the contents of that cryotube.

A small thunk at his legs while repairing some tangled tubing on one of Sunny's legs had him looking down to a bright yellow youngling. "Ratchet!" Bee chirped happily, little doorwings flaring. "Can I help?"

"He wanted to check on everything," Optimus explained from the doorway as Ratchet leaned down to pick up the tiny youngling. "I hope it isn't a bother, Ratchet. You know how close he is with Sunstreaker and Sideswipe, though. I could not talk him out of it."

Ratchet was not surprised, of course. Bee was extremely close to the twins, and beyond that, he had a spark of gold. The medic leaned down slowly to pick up the youngling, setting him on the berth beside Sunstreaker. He watched the youngling's antennae and doorwings flicker some in concern before he draped himself across the mech's chestplate. "Hugs make everything better." He heard the youngling whisper, warming his tired spark some. Little blue optics peeked back up at him. "Is it okay that I snuggle Sunny for a bit? And then Sides?"

(How could Ratchet have possibly said no?)

"Once I get Sunny all fixed up, I'll be bringing Sideswipe back online. He doesn't need anything repaired that his self-repair won't fix soon enough. You can snuggle him then, okay?" The youngling was already making himself comfortable against Sunstreaker's side, earning a fond huff from Ratchet. "You just stay there while I work, alright. I'll move you over to Sides' in a few kliks." He got a tiny nod, before the youngling yawned and shuttered his optics. The medic threw a look to Optimus, who simply shrugged. As if he was not partially to blame somehow for the sweet monster that snuggled up to his own

youngling – even if Sunstreaker was not *really* a youngling anymore.

Bee helped some to keep him from focusing on his sparkmate. He woke up before getting moved to help bring Sideswipe out of stasis, and happily told Ratchet all the stories Hot Rod had shared with the younglings while he worked. Stories that Ratchet had occasionally lived through part of, but the medic would not burst the youngling's bubble by telling him this.

When Sideswipe slowly came to, Bumblebee's happy little chatter turned its attention to the red twin. It was adorable to watch as Bee clung to Sideswipe and retold all of those new stories to him with his little doorwings happily angled up and antennae flicking animatedly. It had Ratchet falling back to stand by Optimus momentarily and just watch them. "Y'know, if I hadn't been the one to separate him, I'd think you were lying about being his carrier." He teased lightly, earning a deep chuckle from Optimus.

"He is quite tiny. And antennae and doorwings… he really is a mystery sometimes." The Prime admitted. "But he is mine. Just as Sideswipe and Sunstreaker are yours."

"Those two aren't mine the same way, Prime."

Optimus offered Ratchet the smallest smile, "But they're yours, all the same. Just as Bumblebee would likely have still been mine, even if I were not one of his creators. Destiny would have brought us together, just as it did you and the twins. I'm sure of it."

A snort, and Ratchet was shaking his head fondly. "Do I need to call Jazz? You're getting all poetic and sentimental on us again." He was moving forward to help Sideswipe move around now, the mech's calibration process having obviously gone slightly wrong judging by his bit of a wobble. "Easy, mechling, easy. Don't rush it. I'm sure little Bee here can wait a few kliks before showing you around. Don't need you going down again with your brother. I've got enough work on my hands already with him and 'Jack, thank you very much."

(He hoped Optimus was right, though. That destiny would have brought the twins into his life, no matter the circumstances.)

Bluestreak was practically welded to Sideswipe's side the moment he was cleared to leave the medbay. The Praxian insisted on staying with Sideswipe even when recharging, even though the mech still slept in the medbay to stay near his family. "Think I don't also want to be there when Streaker finally comes to?" Bluestreak had countered

when Sideswipe told him that he did not have to stay there. “What sort of triad would we be if I didn’t?”

Triad. It made Sideswipe’s spark soar that the Praxian used the term so carelessly. As if they were already bonded. Pit, as if they had actually courted already and were not just… whatever they were. Sideswipe still had no way to describe it properly. Together was as good as it got. That was all he needed right now, to help silence his internal panic at just how *quiet* the other half of his spark had been. As if Sunstreaker had somehow gone completely dormant, or worse. He hated how alone it made him feel. He could *see* Sunstreaker, could hear the beep of the spark monitor, but it was like his twin was gone. Ratchet had offered him sedatives to help settle him, but he had refused. Bluestreak was keeping him grounded pretty well. Sedatives would only dull his senses and potentially keep him from realizing when his brother needed him.

. . .

A few small groups had gone to scope out was left of their old base, collecting what obvious important personal items they could. Sideswipe had not expected anyone to find anything of theirs but was pleasantly surprised when Cliffjumper had managed to locate one of Sunny’s paintings. He had gone to meet the mech with Blue when the scouting party came back, thanking Cliffjumper profusely and sneaking off with the painting before anyone could see what it was.

When it founds its way into the medbay beside Wheeljack’s cryotube, Ratchet had nearly bawled his optics out. That same painting that Sunny had made for his and Wheeljack’s anniversary of their happy little family. How it had survived, Ratchet could not guess. But he did not care. It was there, and it had survived. It had to be a sign.

Wheeljack and Sunstreaker would be alright. They would survive.

Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

> Hi guys! I'm so sorry for the delay. Life has been chaotic recently, as I'm sure everyone already knows. A few quick updates:
>
> 1. I've finalized a chapter count for this, and have the story outlined, and a large portion written out. The end is in sight, even though we really are only half way there.
> 2. I've made a discord server, in case anyone wants updates in between posts! (or to prod me too remind me to actually update lol) I figured it would also be a good place to just nerd out with other people about transformers and share fics we all enjoy! The link for that is HERE
>
> I also apologize in advance for... well, this chapter.
> Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sunstreaker was back online in a few orns, and Wheeljack was ready to be brought online only a couple of orns after that. Ratchet was amazed by how well he had recovered in the cryotube and extremely grateful for whatever odd foresight made Alpha Trion ensure there were some there. The medic was practically quivering with his own anxious excitement as he slowly onlined his mate's systems one at a time. The twins and Bluestreak lurked off to the side, their anticipation coming off them in waves.

He did not remember them.

It was obvious to Ratchet the moment Wheeljack was fully online and just… *staring*. He knew that stare, could remember it clearly from the first time he had worked on the scientist so many vorns ago. This look of sheer wonder and amazement. "Is this the Well?" Wheeljack whispered, much like he had then. In fact, exactly like he had then. His expression shifted to something of wonder soon after Ratchet could feel him prodding curiously at his bond, and it *hurt* to see.

"Oh." Wheeljack whispered softly, sadly almost. Like he had figured it out now and Ratchet broke. His knees buckled beneath him and he collapsed to the floor beside the berth Wheeljack lay on, startling the other mechs in the medbay greatly.

This had always been a possibility, just like Wheeljack not surviving the ordeal at all. But with how well everything else was going, Ratchet had *hoped.* Surely, if Sunstreaker woke up with just some minor calibration issues, Wheeljack would have been fine. After everything else he had been through recently, surely the universe could not make it any worse. As their younglings rushed to Ratchet's side, he could make out Wheeljack's sad whisper. "My memory banks were corrupted, huh?" He sounded resigned to it, like he had once expected something like this to happen.

He probably had, if all his old accidents were as bad as Perceptor led Ratchet to believe.

First Aid stepped in to finish looking over Wheeljack while the twins saw to Ratchet. Sunstreaker did not say a word the entire time as he helped his brother move their guardian to a medberth to try and get his gyros stabilized again. His optics kept flicking to the scientist as he answered First Aid's questions. After Ratchet was fine and Wheeljack was cleared, Sunny, Sides, and Blue were ushered out of the medbay. Ratchet and Wheeljack had much to discuss. A few orns later, and Wheeljack was staying with Perceptor temporarily. To give himself time to adjust to everything with his memory gaps. He got back to work easily enough, at least. He had not blown anything up since he had returned to his lab.

It was all wrong.

Ratchet did not dwell on his own pain at this development, focusing instead on his – *their* twins. Neither of them was handling any of this well. Not the loss of their home, their belongings, and now their perceived loss of their other "creator." Sunny had become practically mute, relaying anything he needed to say to Sideswipe through their bond. The proud warrior was a mere shadow of his former self, and it came as a shock to no one that this affected him so badly. He had always been remarkably close to Wheeljack, letting the scientist give him all sorts of cutesy nicknames and pull him into tight, paint scraping hugs without complaint.

He left the room he shared with Sideswipe for check ups and to get energon. That was it. Ratchet had watched sadly as Sideswipe practically dragged the other twin out, who did not say a word but would still snarl at his twin. His field was uncontrolled and often sending out waves of anger and anguish that his unchanging expression would not show. Sideswipe weathered the brunt of it all, relenting often enough and locking himself away with Sideswipe.

Two decaorns of that, and Wheeljack found his way into their quarters. “Smokey recommended spending some time together, especially now that I am more settled. If you want to, that is.” The scientist seemed shy, uncertain even over the bond. As if Ratchet could ever reject him, memories or no. The medic simply stepped aside and motioned him in, calling for the twins over his shoulder. The moment Sunstreaker’s optics settled on Wheeljack, he absolutely lit up.

Ratchet thought that they might just be alright in the end.

. . .

“-a wild story, huh, Sunny?” Brawl jostled him some, startling Sunstreaker as he came to. He flickered his optics, taking in his surroundings quickly. He was in the rec room sitting with Brawn, Ironhide, and Hound. When did he get here? He nodded somewhat just to get the attention off him as he ran a quick memory check.

4 joors missing. *4 joors. Just gone*. Last he remembered he had been giving the jet twins back to Prowl after watching them with Sideswipe for a shift. He had been outside their quarters, waiting for the SIC to let him in. *What had happened?* Had something gone wrong with his memory core after the previous base accident that just had not been caught yet? Was he going to wind up forgetting practically everything, just like Wheeljack?

His systems were flashing overheating warnings across his vision as his frame started to tremble. His audio receptors seemed to crackle, unable to hear whatever a now concerned Ironhide was saying to him. A hand waved in front of his face and he flung himself from his chair, sparkrate soaring through the roof. *What is wrong with me?* He wanted to scream, to call for someone to help him *stop* it. Whatever it was. He did not want to forget. He could not forget. He-

Sides was sitting next to him as he froze mid-sentence. Ratchet was staring at him in concern. He was in the medbay. Bluestreak was standing off to the side, doorwings twitching anxiously. He shuttered his optics quickly, not aware of what he had been saying. The last thing he could recall was panicking in the rec room. So, he voiced that, clenching Sideswipe’s hand in his when it was offered. “I-I’m missing time.” He mumbled softly. “4 joors. Now 4 and a half.”

The medic frowned, keeping his field pulled tight and bond not giving away much. “It is likely just something residual from your accident.

Seeing as it has only just presented itself, it hopefully is not major, but I'll keep you here overnight to be monitored. I'd also like to do a scan if your fine lowering a few of your firewalls." Ratchet waited for Sunstreaker to nod before continuing. "And if nothing turns up, I may just check on your actual memory banks, to ensure it is nothing physical that I somehow missed and could repair.

"Since you seem completely aware now, what's the last thing you do remember?" Ratchet asked, moving to take a seat across from him now. The medic had his field pulled tight, but Sunny did not need to feel it to read Ratchet now. Ratchet's emotions likely mirrored his own then, as he worked to probe his memory; worried and absolutely terrified. Who could blame the mech, with Wheeljack's own corrupted memory banks?

Sunstreaker went back to his most recent memory before coming to awareness in the rec room. He gave a quick recount of what he did remember, voice remaining level even as his tensed posture gave his anxiety and stress away. He watched as Ratchet took notes, listened as he gave him various instruction before getting ready to probe passed his firewalls. The yellow mech had been through this process many times since his initial scan coming to the Autobots, was used to it even. Could let his processor wander as his body went through the motions. Detach from reality momentarily – but voluntarily this time.

Blackouts were not entirely uncommon for Sunstreaker, unfortunately. But he generally did not lose all of his memory from that time, just bits and pieces easily explained away by slipping into his battle protocols during a fight. Never had he blacked out just relaxing around base off shift. And his battle blackouts had developed a sort of trigger to snap him out of it, to get him settled again. He did not know if they had tried it, but he definitely did not remember interacting with Blue or Sides before finding himself in the medbay, yet they were both with him. So, he felt safe eliminating his battle protocols from suspicion. So, that left software or hardware malfunctions. Likely hardware, after the ambush. Hardware could be fixed. It was simple. He would never get back those few joors, but who cared?

He could be fixed. Ratchet would fix him, just like always.

It was late in the next orn when he was given a clean bill of health and allowed to leave the medbay. Nothing was wrong with him. Ratchet said it was likely just a side effect of stress and his recovery after… well, *everything*. Ratchet was not worried about it, Sideswipe was not worried about it, Blue was not worried about it. He was

absolutely fine. Ratchet's one recommendation was to take it easy and try to destress. Something Sides and Blue were eager to help with, dragging him off for what they only referred to as quality time.

And Sunny would be lying if he tried to claim it was not relaxing and nice to spend time with them like that. To just unwind and enjoy each other after all the recent chaos. But there was still a cloud looming over him, an ominous feeling in his spark that he could not shake. Nothing in his life had ever been easy or simple. Maybe he was being a pessimist like Sides always said, and it really was just stress.

For once, he might be fine. He really wanted to be.

. . .

"I heard about Sunstreaker," Wheeljack said over the cube of high grade he was sipping on across from Ratchet. They had gotten into the habit of sitting at the small table in their quarters together most nights and enjoy a drink with each other before Wheeljack headed back to Perceptor's. It was nice, even if it made Ratchet feel a wave of bitter sadness to see 'Jack leave. "How's he doing?"

Ratchet shrugged as he stared down at his own cube, "As good as can be expected I guess, which is to say, not at all. Not that I can blame him. Primus, the mechling can't seem to catch a break lately. He recovers from one injury, just to get another, and now this." And Ratchet takes note of the way Wheeljack perks up, being reminded then that this Wheeljack does not remember the pain of their youngling falling from the sky and nearly dying on the battlefield. He was spared that pain. And Ratchet was jealous of that, honestly. "He's had a rough life. Both of those younglings have."

"They're hardly younglings now, Ratchet." Wheeljack corrected him, setting his own cube down now.

And hearing that in Wheeljack's voice *hurt*. The medic looked away, scowling at nothing really. "They'll always be my younglings."

"Ratchet…" Wheeljack spoke softly, resting a hand over one of the medic's tentatively. "We can sever the bond. I-if this- if *I'm* too much like this. If it would be easier for you. I mean, I don't even have the memories to miss you, so-"

Ratchet snatched his hand back, not looking at Wheeljack. The scientist could feel the anger coming off him in waves, though. "Do you think I would have bonded to you if something like this was

enough to make me give up? You're still *alive* and very much *you*. Why would I break a bond when I can still have you? So, you have to get to know me again! Do you want to sever the bond? Is that why you brought this up?"

"Never." Wheeljack said with absolute conviction. "My spark is yours, memories or no memories. It was yours before I even knew you. It will always be yours. You just- you've been so shut off through it- I was worried you didn't want this anymore."

"You've got enough going on right now, you don't need all of my emotions just making it worse!"

"That's not your decision to make," 'Jack's voice did not rise at all, even though Ratchet could see his annoyance in the set of his optics. "Who I love and what I am willing to do for them or carry for them, will never be your decision to make. So do *not* try to keep me from figuring out my love for you again."

Ratchet snarled now, "Don't make loving someone sound so simple."

"And don't you make it sound so hard!" Wheeljack snapped back finally, pushing himself up and out of his chair. "I may not remember it, but I *know* in my spark that loving you must have been the easiest thing because I *still do*. It may not be the same, and I don't remember all of your favorite things and our anniversaries like you do, but that's all just… extra. That has no affect on my feelings. What is affecting me is my sparkmate *shutting me out* after I wake up, finding out everything I do remember happened *hundreds of vorns ago.* How do you think-"

Both of them leapt apart, not realizing Wheeljack had been inching closer and closer to Ratchet around the table during his rant, a sniffling and panicking Sideswipe coming rushing into the quarters suddenly. "I-I can't find Sunny." Sideswipe said frantically, looking around the quarters as if his brother would appear. "He- primus, he shut me out. I can't track him. Blue is looking for him, too, but no one else has seen him recently and Red is in recharge and-" The red twin was shaking as he stopped his pacing, just staring at Ratchet and Wheeljack. "What do I do?"

Wheeljack was moving towards Sides before Ratchet could even process everything, grabbing his shoulders lightly. "You're gonna hang out here with Ratchet. That's what you're gonna do. I'll go look around base, get Jazz and Mirage to help. You're no help like this,

Sides.” Sides came crashing into Ratchet’s hold as Wheeljack left their quarters, arms wrapping around him.

A calming hand settled between Sides shoulder struts as he buried his face into Ratchet’s chestplate. “They’ll find him. I’m sure Sunny is fine.” He whispered to his youngling, hoping beyond hope that he was not wrong.

Chapter End Notes

Here is the discord link again! Feel free to come join me!
HERE

Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

> This chapter actually has some happiness. Enjoy it while it lasts, my dudes.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He was scared. Somehow, he had wound up down at the range. Issue was that Sunstreaker had absolutely no recollection of leaving Sides and Blue to go down there with Ironhide. His memory banks were missing another chunk. It was just gone, again. And he found he was terrified of bringing it up. He was tossing the blaster in hand aside, ignoring the shout from Ironhide as he booked it from the range. Warnings lit up his vision, blocking it somewhat as he just *ran*. He needed to-

"Hang tight, 'Streaker." Jazz's voice had him shuttering his optics quickly, looking up where the mech stood over him. *No. Not again.* He wanted to scream, because why was this happening now? And why to him? Had he not suffered enough already? His panic levels were rising as he sunk into himself, shaking his head at whatever Jazz was saying to him now.

Sunstreaker was curled up tightly, hands clawed over his audio receptors, when 'Jack made it down by the brig, having wedged himself into a corner next to a storage crate. The scientist gave Jazz a nod in thanks before moving towards Sunstreaker slowly. He was struck by the sight of the proud warrior reduced to what he really was – a sad, tormented youngling, sucked into a war that was likely to tear his entire family unit apart. He had not seen this side of Sunny; he had not seen much of the mech, to be honest. The other avoided him like the plague outside of the rare moments at Ratchet's quarters, and it was not difficult to guess why. Jack knelt beside him, resting a hand gently on his shoulder. "Sunny?" He asked softly, trying to get him to snap out of his trance. "Sunstreaker?" There was no response, just more sparkwrenching sobs. He sighed, rubbing lightly at his shoulder struts. "Sunshine, come on. What's wrong, mechling?"

Finally, a response, as blue optics flickered up at him briefly. "Y-you used to call me that. Sunshine."

Wheeljack chuckled softly as the yellow twin unfurled some more

while he rubbed between his shoulders. “Is that so? Guess some things are harder to forget than others, huh? And you didn’t mind it?”

“Sunshine was fine. But- but only from you.”

Wheeljack let out another tiny laugh, “Well, I’m honored.” He continued rubbing lightly, sitting pressed against his charge – his *sparkling*. “What gotcha worked up, Sunshine?”

Everything, Sunstreaker wanted to say. *Everything and nothing and way too much to process.* But admitting aloud that something had to be wrong, more wrong than just stress, was next to impossible. He could not bring himself to speak, no matter how much the urge bubbles up in his chest. The words would not leave him. Could not. After a long, shuttering breath in, he managed to get out, “Stress. Everything is- it’s falling apart.” Not a complete lie, but all he could force himself to say. It was not like he knew the whole truth, anyway.

“It’s not falling apart.” Wheeljack insisted, voice cracking some because he could easily see why Sunstreaker would think that. If he were any other mech, he might even agree with him. “It’s- well, it isn’t great right now. I’ll give you that. But something broken can always be fixed. And maybe it won’t be exactly the same as before, but that does not have to be a bad thing.” He settled his hand on Sunstreaker’s shoulder now, giving it a firm grip. He wanted to hug him, felt it was what *he* would have done previously, but feared it may upset the other more. “Sometimes… sometimes it is better, in the end. Different, sure, but that does not make it worse than before.”

A little snort escaped Sunstreaker as frame relaxed. With a small shake of his head, he whispered, “You always were extremely optimistic.”

Wheeljack frowned some. “You say that like I’m not still me. I didn’t forget everything, Sunny. Some very, very important things, yes. But… I’m still me.”

But you’re not the you I knew. Sunstreaker did not speak, simply pulling his field tight and slowly opening his bonds back up. *Relief/fear/joy/ love* came pouring in from Sideswipe in an instant, nearly overloading Sunny’s processor with the sudden influx of feeling. He imagined Bluestreak was likely just as worried, since last he remembered, he had been with Blue and Sides. He sent a pulse of reassurance to his twin and caught himself about to send another pulse down a bond that did not exist. He had never done that before, *knew* that he could not contact Bluestreak like he did Sides.

As Wheeljack helped him up and slowly led him back to Ratchet's, he found his thoughts linger on that impulse to reach for the other mech. He had never wanted that closeness with anyone but Sideswipe, had not even notice the depth of his feelings for the sniper until then. Sure, he admitted to liking Bluestreak; they had been in a sort of triad relationship for a few vorns at that point, albeit unofficially. Why did he have to realize this *now,* when he had so much else going on and no time to act on these feelings properly?

Cursing his poor timing, he shoved those thoughts to the back of his processor as he moved with Wheeljack, limping some. Ratchet was likely to murder him for aggravating his injuries again. Sideswipe was likely to cling to him for the next decacycle, as well. At least that meant someone would be around to rouse him from any episodes, or at least keep him safe. Pit, Sunny would be surprised if Bluestreak did not wind up bunking with them for a few orns. It would not be the first time he had.

And he was largely right, or course, because their family was very predictable. Ratchet grumbled and ranted at him the entire time he repaired the issue with his hip joint and checked back over his spine, but his field was awash with relief and love the entire time. Sideswipe was the clingiest he had ever been, driving Sunstreaker to snap at him when he wound up scratching his paint from holding onto him so tightly at one point. That got him another scolding, this time from Blue. Not that the Praxian seemed even half as stern as his oldest brother while doing the scolding. It was difficult to seem serious when your doorwings were all aflutter behind you, after all.

Things slipped into something resembling normal, after that. Wheeljack was back in their quarters, and Ratchet seemed to be much less tense with him around once more. Sunstreaker still lost bits of time, but they were always small, insignificant chunks, so he did not mention them. He could live with a joor or two missing every decacycle or so. There was no point upsetting everything because his processor was a little slow to heal after everything. He had been injured so badly recently and been put under so much stress. Everything was going back to normal, so surely, he would, too.

Sides just had to go and ruin that after Bluestreak left their room late one orn, though. Something was bothering his brother, he could *feel* it, but he could not figure out why. Especially not after Bluestreak had just left them after a delightful overload. It did not make sense. "What's wrong?" Sunny whispered as Sides got up and paced beside their berth some.

“Nothing,” Sides insisted for the briefest moment. He crumbled under Sunstreaker’s raised optic ridge, sighing. “How did you know?”

“Aside from the pacing? We’re two halves of a whole,” Sunny said, reaching for Sideswipe. The other gave in, hand reaching back. Sides sighed, and Sunstreaker’s spark dropped.

Sideswipe fell against him, hugging his twin loosely. Something was definitely up; Sunny knew it. “What about Bluestreak?” He asked tentatively, approaching the question cautiously. They had fooled around with the other mech plenty of times; it was only natural, being so close in age. And Sideswipe saw the way the other two looked at each other sometimes. He hoped beyond hope that his twin would not go and prove all his assumptions wrong. He teeked his field, not finding anger. Just curiosity.

“What about him?” Lips brushed against his forehelm. “You know my feelings for Blue. Why bring him up?”

“Would you want to bond with him?”

There was a long silence, but no anger or annoyance across the bond or in Sunstreaker's field. There was nothing there for a moment before acceptance and *joy* flooded him. “Together? The three of us?” A quick nod. Always together. More *joy* in Sunstreaker's field. He grinned, and Sideswipe found himself grinning back. “Praxians are big on tradition. We would need to ask Prowl.”

A bright, happy laugh as Sideswipe caressed Sunstreaker's face and gave him a deep kiss. “As if he would say no, since we’ve bypassed most of the other traditional bits.” As easily evidenced by Bluestreak sneaking out of their quarters that they still shared with their guardians to go back to his own in the barracks. Or their obvious monogamy with the mech since they were younglings. Every bot on base knew that the three of them were together, and the few who had not and had still pursued Blue had been chased away by jealous twins long ago.

Which is how they found themselves waiting outside of Prowl’s office the next orn, eager to just get it over with already so they could ask Bluestreak. The sniper was likely suspicious by now, since they had avoided eating with him that morning like they generally did. So, the second they had sat down, Sideswipe just blurted out why they were there. He rambled for a few kliks about how much they loved Bluestreak and how they would give anything for him before his twin

lightly nudged him into silence.

Prowl eyed the two sitting before him, his exterior cool and collected. Internally, though? He wanted to jump for joy. *Finally.* He had waited for this moment, since the three younglings had finally started to spend time as a group. Everyone had. The first time Bluestreak had been in the same battle as them and talked Sunstreaker back to them? He had assumed the question was coming the next orn. Better late than never, he supposed.

The moment the twins started to fidget uncomfortably Prowl flicked his wings forward with a smile. “It is about time.” He settled on, earning two confused looks. “I had anticipated this much sooner. In fact, everyone but Jazz had bet well before this.”

Sideswipe blinked, “Jazz actually bet longer?”

“His words were, ‘Streaker is a stubborn one.’ And he is not wrong.” Prowl gave them a rare smirk as Sideswipe laughed aloud at that. “Have you asked Bluestreak yet? If not, it would be wise to do so soon, unless you plan to wait. He swapped patrol shifts with Cliffjumper and will be leaving in just over a joor to swap out.”

That was all the Twins needed to hear before they said a quick thanks and were rushing out of Prowl’s office.

Chapter End Notes

> Hey, ever wonder when I'm gonna update? ME TOO! Feel free to come harass me on Discord, or just chat about other transformers stuff: HERE

Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

> This chapter is fairly short, but mostly because the next one is a fucking long boi.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ratchet was taking the twins moving into their new quarters with Bluestreak harder than ‘Jack, which was to be expected. Their own quarters felt so impossibly empty and much too big now. He was happy for the future triad, of course he was. He just hated to see their younglings go, even if they were only a few halls away from the officers’ quarters. Wheeljack teased him about it, suggesting that they set up their old family game nights again the orn after the twins officially moved.

Ratchet’s spine went ramrod straight, tentatively reaching for the other across the bond. “‘Jack… do you-“ It was dangerous to hope, as Ratchet and Perceptor have both done the calculations for the probability of his love getting any of his memories back after their partial corruption. And the odds were definitely not in their favor. Yet, his love stood there grinning at him and Ratchet could not chase his hope away.

“I remember bits and pieces of things.” The scientist admitted, stepping in close to Ratchet. “Just little things at first, honestly, things I figured my processor might have made up. But as I remembered more little bits...” He shrugged audial fins flashing a happy bright blue briefly. “It’s not all gone, Ratch.”

As Ratchet surged forward to cling tightly to his sparkmate, he could not stop the shaking of his frame. It was not perfect, as Wheeljack still only remembered some things. But when had they ever been perfect? The scientist laughed in his hold, hugging Ratchet back just as tightly. “Oh, thank *Primus*. I don’t think I could handle sitting through bonding ceremony planning with Prowl without you.”

Wheeljack snorted a laugh at that, field awash with joy. “Who even bothers with bonding ceremonies during a war?”

“Praxians. Mirage probably would, too, honestly.”

Bonding ceremonies were the least of the Autobots’ concerns in the

coming orns. Having pushed the Autobots further into Iacon, the Decepticons turned their attention to the few Neutral camps active still on Cybertron. They were sending out strike teams to chase the Decepticons off and help survivors get to safety. It saw the soon to be triad in the field for most of it. They were an efficient and deadly team, with Hot Rod and Blurr added to their ranks they had a bunch higher success rate than Prowl had expected.

For vorns, they continued like that. Come back to Iacon, relax and start to plan a bonding ceremony, and then stop because they were getting sent out again. It was driving Sunstreaker up a wall, but he kept his complaints to their quarters. “Prowl just wants what he thinks is best for me. It’s fine, Sunny. Not like he is going to call it off. This is just formal nonsense. Please let my brother have this.” And Sunstreaker had lost the ability to say no to Bluestreak vorns ago, so wait he would. At least they had plenty else to do with helping keep the Decepticons at bay. It made the time passing quicker.

. . .

None of the Autobots wanted Bee or the Jet Twins cleared for duty. None of them. There was only so much Prowl could do to keep the Jet Twins stuck in battle training, given that fliers were essentially their own thing with how few of them the Autobots had. Bumblebee, though, was much, much easier. He had done excellently up until his last test, doing everything the others had not expected him capable of given his small size with a concerning amount of ease. In fact, Jazz had put in a request for Bee being placed with Special Operations because of how adaptive and slippery the young mech proved to be. He claimed Bee had excellent potential as a scout and infiltrator.

Optimus could not stand the idea of his precious sparkling being out in the field yet, though, so he had stepped in for Bee's final test. Generally, a simulation mission was run that the mech had to pass. Bee would inevitably fool the simulation unless Prowl's battle computer was helming it, which was beyond unfair. Which is why Optimus pulled in Sunstreaker and Sideswipe. The two were wildcards, and often behaved in battle much like the Decepticons that had taught them to fight initially. If any mechs could keep Bee safe for just a little longer by getting the mechling to fail, it was them.

“Absolutely not.” Ratchet said firmly, shaking his helm. Why would Prowl even consider going along with such nonsense for Bee’s final test? “Are you out of your processor? No, wait, don’t answer that, because you have to be if you want Bee to *face the twins*.” Not that

Ratchet did not trust the twins with his life, and the twins absolutely adored Bee. But the twins were rogue entities. The berserker rage they went into made them completely random variables on the battlefield, and Sunny still had very little control over coming out of it. If their battle protocols were triggered at all during the exercise, they could kill Bee. Surely Prowl would have run into that in all of his calculations.

Prowl gave an offended huff. “I trust that the twins can act acc-“

“The twins can, yes. *Those berserkers you send out into the field*?” Ratchet said pointedly, still completely against the twins going into battle as early as they did, their past be damned. Those were his younglings. Crazed demons or not. He hated what it did to them, how upset and silent they both always were after. But why would anyone else in command care, if the job got done? “Do you realize that if one or Primus forbid both slip and their battle protocols go up, and they hurt or kill Bee, they would never be able to live with themselves? They cannot control it, Prowl. No matter what you think, they can’t.” Ratchet got closer to the Praxian, jabbing a finger into the center of his chestplates. “If we lose 3 younglings because of your recklessness, we'll also need a new SIC. Because those two are *my* younglings.”

The Praxian scowled back at Ratchet, one optic ridge raised. “Are you threatening a superior officer, Ratchet?”

Yes, he was, but saying yes simply would give Prowl want he wanted. And it would leave that rage bubbling up in Ratchet unresolved. So, he shook his head, “Nah, I’m not threatening a superior officer. I’m threatening the sentient battle computer that keeps trying to get my sons killed. I like to think that there is a difference between the two. Maybe there’s not, though.”

And Ratchet feared he was right, because before he knew it, mechs were constructing a small maze that Bee would have to navigate. His objective was to reach the center, acquire a datachip, and then exit while being hunted by “Decepticons”. It was going to end absolutely horribly. Sunstreaker seemed fairly chipper, not concerned at all. “Li’l Bee can’t trigger my protocols. He’s like my baby brother.” Sunstreaker had insisted. “He’s harmless.” That had gotten him a concerned look from the red twin, but Sideswipe said nothing for once.

At least he seemed to also think this was a horrible idea. And if anyone’s opinion should have mattered, it would be Sideswipe’s.

Prowl had them do a few laps through the maze, giving each twin a map of the layout. It was meant to assuage any concerns they had about it. More familiar they were with their surroundings, the more likely that their processors were to recognize it as just a training exercise. Their battle protocols should not activate. Prowl had taken every precaution he could come up with to make this safe, but Sideswipe was still on edge. There was just that nagging concern at the back of his processor. They should *not* be doing this. He understood their reasoning, but Bumblebee was created during a war. He had grown up watching everyone he knows go off and fight. Of course, the kid was going to want to help. They could only delay it for so long. This just seemed like an extremely unnecessary risk.

The orn of the exercise came too quickly. They took the maze before Bee, both wandering about. Sideswipe did not stray too far from Sunstreaker, though. That bad feeling would not go away. He had to trust himself on this one, even if he could feel Sunny's annoyance through their bond. '*Better safe than sorry. You'll thank me if my feeling is right.*' Sideswipe had said, ignoring the grumbles he caught blaming "bad energon".

They spotted Bee not far from the center, datachip already in his hand. "Stop right there!" Sideswipe called, readying his blaster. (The charge was lowered so it would not really injure Bee; both twins had insisted on that safety measure.)

Bee shot his blaster quickly at a camera on the wall above them, causing it to come falling and crash into Sunstreaker's helm. The mech stumbled forward, optics flickering briefly. "Sorry!" He called instinctively, taking a step towards them. He startled when he heard the growl of Sunny's engine, though. "Sunny?"

Sideswipe was charging at his twin the second he heard the growl, "Bee, run!" It had happened. Like Sideswipe and Ratchet had warned, something small and insignificant had startled Sunstreaker. His hold had slipped. And now Sideswipe had to keep Bumblebee safe from his twin. *[We need help! Sunny slipped! Send Blue quick!]*

Chapter End Notes

Uh, yeah. Don't hate me lol

As always, feel free to come and chat with me (or remind me to update) on discord: HERE

Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

> So, so sorry for the delay, dudes. I hit a bit of writers block when polishing this chapter up.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Slag,” Sideswipe breathed out, throwing his body into the other shoulder first to knock him over and stop his rampage. This was a horrid idea, and he and Ratchet had been against it from the beginning for this very reason. He hissed out as Sunny's blade nicked a line in his arm, his own battle protocols down. “Thanks, Prime.” He grumbled under his breath, refusing to extend either of his own blades as he stumbled back from his feral twin.

“Sides!” Bee called out from further down the corridor, looking as small as he once had briefly. Also drawing Sunny's attention back to him, unfortunately.

With a groan, Sideswipe launched himself forward once more. He knocked his twin over, the distraction being just enough for Sides to send them both tumbling. “Run, Bee!” Sides shouted, not focused really on where the younger mech was so much as not being impaled as the twins rolled across the floor. Sparks flew as the blades scraped his armor and the floor, but thankfully did not connect with any more lines just yet. No point in just leaking out *in their base* because the stupid Prime did not want his precious little sparkling going into battle. Well, Sunny could certainly make that possible, Sides thought sarcastically. Unless he killed himself by killing Sideswipe, as he seemed so intent to do. The other managed to win their tumble, pressing a blade to Sideswipe's throat and snarling.

His optics were crimson again. Sideswipe completely forgot about the blade at his throat for a moment, staring up into crimson he had long thought gone. *What?*

The blade came down, severing the first layer of cables at his throat before Sunstreaker staggered back. The crimson flickered briefly, before the mech was charging off and leaving Sideswipe there to die. *Please, get here quick, Blue*, Sideswipe thought, sending out as many pings for help as he could. If they were all lucky, Sideswipe would go into stasis and take Sunny with him before he got to Bee. When had

they ever been lucky, though?

. . .

Bee shrieked, shrinking back some as Sunstreaker pulled a fist back, optics flickering some. Yellow fists curled up over audio receptors, optics clenched shut. Something was wrong. Sunstreaker settled back some, optics still flickering between crimson and blue. There was energon. Not on Bee, though. Wait, Bee? Why was Bee there?

His optics slipped back to their general cerulean, as Sunstreaker slowly reached forward. “Bee?” He whispered. When had he slipped? How long had Bee seen him *like that*?

Where was Sides?

Sunstreaker kneeled a short distance from Bumblebee, his body trembling as he became more aware of his surroundings. He could just barely pick up an alarm going off in the distance, and hurried footsteps. He reached out to the youngling, ignoring the energon on his hand and the quiver of it. “Li’l Bee. Look at me. Please.” He begged, trying to push the worry in his spark at a dormant bond with Sideswipe. What had happened? “B-bitlet?”

Hands were pulling him back suddenly, Optimus moving in quickly to pick Bumblebee up as if the mech were still a sparkling. Sunstreaker tried to twist away, calling after Optimus and Bee. He did not mean it, whatever happened. They had to know. It was not him!

Those same hands moved to his faceplate, making his optics finally connect with those of Bluestreak. A soft, calming field wrapped around his own, fear buried beneath sadness. But the calm was there, all the same. “Hey, Sunshine,” Blue whispered, smiling a tiny bit. It looked almost painful, at war with the worry in his optics. “You with me?”

“My name’s not Sunshine,” There was no malice in his tone. It was a routine response. His own field tentatively meshed with the other's, his confusion and fear being welcomed and shared. Blue was just as worried and unsure about what had happened as he was. At least he was not alone. “Where is Sideswipe?”

He felt the immediate surge of worry in Blue's field at his brother's name. “Ratchet has him.” Blue cupped his face gently with one hand. “He’ll be okay. So will Bee.”

“I don’t know what happened,” Sunstreaker mumbled in a hurry. One second, they had spotted Bee, and the next he was hovering over him. About to hurt him. Primus, he could have hurt Bee. He could have *killed* him. He had not blacked out like that in any sort of battle scenario in so long. He had it under control. “I don’t know what happened. We- we were fine. Everything was fine. What-“

You hurt them.

First Aid was moving Blue aside now, kneeling before Sunstreaker. He was vaguely aware of the other talking to him, guiding him through slowing his venting. Trying to calm him. He was pulling Sunny to his feet, leading him with Blue’s help to the medbay. It was like an out-of-body experience. He did not feel connected to his body as this happened. He heard himself respond, simple yes or no answers, but it was like he was hearing someone else say them with his voice. First Aid guided him to a berth off to the side, where he sat for a while, holding Blue’s hand in silence.

Sunstreaker did not know how long had passed before Ratchet was standing before him. He shuttered his optics, startled briefly and coming back to himself. “Ratchet, is he-“

“He’s gonna be just fine.” A servo settled on his shoulder, gripping it gently. He found himself trying to avoid Ratchet’s optics, spark rolling with guilt at the sad look he saw there. “Sunstreaker.” His tone was so *soft*. “Sunny. No one blames you.”

“Ratchet, I-I don't remember it. Any of it. I could have *killed* Bee, and- and I wouldn’t even remember it.” Sunny whispered, distraught. All that time, just gone. He did not even know what he should apologize to Bee for, other than scaring the slag out of him. Bee had not looked injured, but that did not mean anything. Sunstreaker had not gotten a particularly good look at him.

“I assumed as much, from Bee's account of what happened. Blue said he could tell you were more unsettled than usual from your field.” Ratchet’s other servo came up, forcing Sunny to look him in the optics. “This was a bad idea from the start. I tried telling Prowl that. This is not your fault. If it is anyone’s fault, it is Prime and Prowl’s for thinking this wasn’t going to happen.”

Sunny snapped back quickly with, “I should have better control, though!” Because he felt like he should. True, Sideswipe was just as lethal as him in battle, but the other could keep his own protocols at

bay generally and shake them off on his own. Yet Sunstreaker got a camera dropped on his helm and went on a rampage.

Ratchet frowned deeply, field wrapping around Sunstreaker tentatively to try and help comfort his youngling. "… Sunny, is something else going on?"

"I-I've still been having episodes. I keep forgetting things and blacking out. It- it hasn't been for long recently. A joor at most! I thought it was getting better." He felt Blue squeeze his hand tightly, felt the hurt and sadness coming from the other in waves. He should have said something sooner, but he was *scared*. He still is scared. "What if- what if those blackouts are connected to this one?"

Ratchet could not stop his concern from immediately flooding his field at hearing that, wincing internally at the way Sunny shrunk in on himself. "Sunstreaker, why didn't you say anything? This could be something really serious that First Aid and I missed." He was immediately doing deep scans of Sunstreaker's helm, ignoring his scowl. And they came up just as clean as before. Which was troubling. "I'll set something up with Jazz. Chances are there is just something we have missed. He can do an in-depth check to see if maybe there is some stray code issue we can't detect. In the meantime, if it happens again, let me know the klik you come to. Got it?" He waited for a nod before patting Sunny on the head and ignoring the soft growl of the other's engine. "Get some rest. Sides will probably come out of stasis in a few joors."

"Why can't you do the code scan?" Sunstreaker asked softly. "You've always checked for any issues." He ignored Bluestreak squeezing his hand tightly, the meaning behind it. He did not want his suspicion to be true. It *couldn't* be.

The way Ratchet looked away from him was all he needed to know.

(*Shockwave would always have his claws in him, it seemed.*)

He is standing suddenly, startling himself even. "I-I just-" Sunstreaker needs to *move*, to get away. The world is caving in on him and he *hates* it. He just wants to hide away from it all. Bluestreak's grip on his hand tightens, binding him to that spot. Ratchet's standing before him, optics lit with worry as he speaks but Sunny hears none of it. Ratchet began to look more concerned, shouting something to someone over his shoulder as he gently moved Sunstreaker to sit down again. He looked *scared*.

He is scared *of you*.

“No!” Sunstreaker yelled aloud, scrambling back on the berth after yanking his hand from Bluestreak. The Praxian startled briefly, reaching for him quickly to wrap his arms round him tightly.

The needle Ratchet quickly stabbed into one of his neck cables with a sedative showed that it was not out of affection. And that *hurt*. “Why?” Sunny asked weakly as his systems slowed. “I-I didn’t… I didn’t mean it. Please.” He was out cold before he could hear their answers.

. . .

Smokescreen was ready for Sunstreaker when he came back online. Not that he wanted to talk or even knew where to start. *I blackout randomly, and I’m worried that is connected to when I almost just killed my twin and Bumblebee?* Or *I’m worried that Shockwave is still in my processor?* What did they want from him? They did not need Smokescreen to tell them something was wrong with Sunstreaker; he had known something was wrong with him for vorns. Sunstreaker still answered all of Smokescreen’s question, recounting what had happened during his previous blackouts and what he remembered from this time. Answering them changed *nothing*.

The moment he was cleared to leave the medbay, he was off to the rec room. Sideswipe would still be out for a few more joors. And Sunstreaker just needed to get away from everything for a bit. His usual seat, wedged in a corner where he could see the entire rec room, was open, thankfully. The few mechs in the room watched him warily but said nothing. Once he settled in his spot, they all looked away and went back to what had occupied them before he showed up. He scowled, resting his elbows on the table with his chin propped up on one hand. He was still like that several joors later when Bluestreak came to lead him back to the medbay. Sideswipe was awake, at last.

Sideswipe’s vocoder had been injured; not irreparably so, thankfully. He would need to be silent to allow for it to heal properly. Not talking was super difficult for Sideswipe, especially a berth ridden Sideswipe. Ratchet, Wheeljack, and Sunny were constantly on a family comm channel with him while he was recovering that was generally filled with Sides and Jack’s chatter. Ratchet would chime in occasionally, even. But Sunny never said a word on it. He barely spoke a word aloud as well, not that anyone aside from Ratchet and Blue seemed to notice. The incident seemed to be more traumatic for him than it had

been for Bee; the youngster had bounced back from it quickly enough. Not Sunstreaker, though.

(Twice. He had tried to kill his literal other half twice.)

'*Stop being so moody. I'm fine.*' Sideswipe prodded him over their bond from where he lay in berth with Blue, earning an optic roll from Sunny; he had finally been allowed back to their quarters that orn. '*I mean it, Sunny.*'

But Sideswipe almost was not fine. If they had been too late in getting to him, or if Sunny had not hesitated, they would both be dead. Nothing about that was *fine*. How could Sideswipe not see that? How-

"*Enough.*" Bluestreak's firm voice snapped Sunstreaker out of his daze, optics snapping to where the other now stood before him, holding his shoulders tightly. "Stop whatever this is, Sunny. You're just sitting over here, *away from us*, tearing yourself apart and I am tired of it. *Talk to us*. Please, if something is wrong, let us know! You can't just- you can't keep hiding this slag from us!" His field flared with his desperation, optics pleading. His faceplate contorted in a hurt expression the moment Sunstreaker brushed his hands off his shoulders, doorwings drooping.

"I just don't want to worry anyone. I had hoped it would just go away." *I didn't want to admit just how broken I am*. And it had almost cost him greatly. Bluestreak had every right to be upset with him over this. If their places were switched, Sunstreaker knows he would be.

"Well, you wound up worrying us anyway!" Blue yelled. It felt wrong to hear, causing Sunstreaker to flinch back some; Bluestreak never raised his voice. He was always soft.. "We're supposed to be a triad. You don't hide things from your triad!" Fury and sorrow was rolling off of the praxian's field in waves, growing the guilt Sunny already felt exponentially.

He raised a hand, reaching for the other as Blue turned and stalked towards the door. "I won't. I promise." He finally found the courage to take the steps needed to grab one of Blue's elbow gently. "Blue. Please- I need you and Sides both to- to figure my slag out. Don't leave me." Primus, he sounded so *weak,* but he knew he was not wrong. Sunstreaker would need all the help he could get to make it through everything. The moment the Praxian turned to crumble in against his chestplate, clinging to him for dear life as he sobbed, should not have left him feeling quite so relieved. That feeling only grew when Sides

came up behind him and joined the embrace, tears dripping onto Sunny's back.

It took Sunny a few moments to realize he was crying, too.

. . .

Sunstreaker was really starting to dread going to the medbay. As a youngling, he spent so much time just hanging out in there that he had not understood at first why mechs avoided it. As he sat on a berth listening to Jazz and Ratchet discuss the scan process, he finally got why

"I'm gonna jack in, 'kay, Streaker?" Jazz said, hands hovering from the neural jack at the base of Sunny's neck. As much as he desperately wanted to say no, he needed to know what was going on with him. So, he just gave the other mech a thumb's up and prepared for the intrusion. "Won't hurt, I promise. May feel odd, though."

Odd did not quite cover the feeling; his processor was reeling at the intrusion, scrambling to shut the saboteur out even as Sunstreaker himself worked to force the firewalls open. His processor fought him every step of the way. He was not in control of his own mind. Not in control of his own systems. It was startling to be a passenger to it all, as Jazz quickly dispatched whatever defenses his processor threw up, until finally he just disconnected with a scowl.

"What was that?" Sunny whispered, optics flickering briefly. "What-"

Jazz groaned loudly, shaking his helm. "That, my mech, was a profile. And your's is *touchy*."

Ratchet was back at Sunstreaker's side in an instant, checking him over with his hands and multiple scans. "A profile? Was it planted by Shockwave? We should remove it, it-" Sunny was startled by Ratchet's entire frame suddenly locking up, optics blown wide. "Battle protocols."

"Got it in one, mech. If I remove that profile, I will wind up fryin' his processor, Hatchet." Jazz says with a sigh, brow plates creased some. The yellow frontliner gave a shudder, arms wrapped around himself. "I could probably pull Sideswipe's, seems like his protocols never formed a full profile, but Streaker's here is hooked in deep. Kill it, ya kill him."

Ratchet did not like that answer, shaking his head. "It- it is just a

profile! How would it kill him?”

Jazz let out a little ex-vent, settling down on the medberth next to Sunstreaker and putting a comforting hand between the mech's shoulders. *He’s trying to help ground me,* Sunny realized, startled by the gentleness of the saboteur. “Because it has latched onto Sunstreaker’s personality matrix. It is trying to take over. I can wall it off to keep it from spreadin’, but I can't separate it enough to extract it. He may physically still be here, remember everythin’ even. But he wouldn’t be our Sunshine no more.”

The yellow frontliner finally spoke up, looking up to Ratchet. “It's fine, Ratchet. Really. I- I'll put the firewalls up, with Jazz's help. M-maybe talk to Smokey about triggers. I just-" He never wanted to hurt Sideswipe or Bee ever again. To lose himself *again*. He had thought he was getting better. The episodes were getting shorter. He had been wrong. Sunstreaker gave Jazz and Ratchet both a sad look. “Don't stress about it. Please. I’ll be fine.”

“Don’t stress about it? Why, so you can just go and bury it? Act like nothing is happening again?” Ratchet snapped some, field held tightly to his frame. “When are you going to learn to actually take care of yourself, youngling?!” Sunstreaker flinched away from the yelling, averting his optics quickly. He felt Sides worried prodding at his spark, but quickly brushed it off. Ratchet was right, after all. “Sunny, I-“

He stood quickly, startling Ratchet and earning a huff from Jazz. “I-I need a moment. I’ll comm you about those firewalls later, Jazz. Thanks.” And he let his feet quickly carry him from the medbay, ignoring Ratchet calling after him. He just needed to think for a bit. That was all.

Chapter End Notes

Once again, pls don't hate me lol

As always, feel free to come and chat with me (or remind me to update) on discord: HERE

Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

> Sorry for the delay, my dudes. This one is short, but the next one is like, hella long, so yeah. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sunstreaker suddenly found himself in the rec room, at a table with Cliff and Ironhide. The two older mechs were laughing away at something, cubes of high grade before them both. Dread washed over his spark. How long was he missing now?

Not that long.

Sunstreaker nearly jumped out of his armor at that, startling Ironhide and Cliff. He waved off their concern quickly, looking around. *What the frag?*

You've been concerned about what I do when you are not in control. I simply came to visit our friends.

"Ya all good, Streaker?" Cliffjumper asked, looking a little concerned. "Do ya want us to get Blue?" Sunny had barely managed to nod before Cliff was obviously reaching out to Blue over comms.

His frame trembled as he *felt* that presence there. He had never felt it before, not that he had noticed. Not before Jazz poked around his processor. Had it been there this whole time? It must have, right? He half expected it to answer him once more, but it did not, seeming content to let him have control of *his* body again. As if it had any right to just *take over.* To steal his life from him. Blue was grabbing his face gently, having seemingly appeared from nowhere. He was speaking, likely saying the usual line.

Blue went reeling backwards as Sunstreaker stood suddenly, Cliff and Ironhide startling as well. "I need to- I-" Sunstreaker stumbled over his words, optics flickering about the rec room frantically before settling on Sideswipe staying in the entrance. He was rushing to his twin in an instant, the other likely having followed Blue. He was wrapped up in the other's arms in an instant, being guided out of the rec room quickly. Blue's field brushed against his, trying to comfort him as he realized he was *panicking*.

“We’ve got you, Sunshine.” Blue said softly, a ground hand settling on one of his shoulder struts. “Jazz and Smokescreen are meeting us in the medbay, okay?”

What did it matter? Sunstreaker thought bitterly, clinging to his two loves as they led him to the medbay. There was nothing that could be done, really. Some firewalls were not going to keep him safe, keep them safe. It *spoke* to him, had a true mind of its own. Firewalls were just delaying the inevitable, surely. It had been taking control from him for so long now, even for short periods of time, living his life. He had so many blank spots in his memory banks, all because of *that voice.* Before he realizes it, Jazz is there, jacking into his med port and pushing *it* back. It does not even fight him, just goes behind the firewalls that Jazz begins throwing up.

It’s suspicious. He does not trust it. Jazz took care of it too easily. It could not be that easy.

“It isn’t,” Jazz said softly as he stepped away from Sunstreaker; he had forgotten the other would be able to hear his thoughts while he was hooked to his medical port. “I’ll teach ya some tricks. To help.” He squeezed Sunny’s shoulder, making him meet his optics through Jazz’s visor. “Good news is it doesn’t appear hostile, outside of when yer protocols get activated. We can work around that.”

“But for how long?” Sunstreaker asked softly, clenching his fists where they rested on his thighs. He finally took in his surroundings; he was in the medbay, seated on a berth against the wall opposite the entrance. They positioned him so he was facing it, the only mech standing in his way really being Jazz. Ratchet, Blue, and Sides were on either side of him. Lingering, but not getting in too close.

Like he was dangerous or something.

Jazz flicked him between his brow plates, earning him a snarl as Sunstreaker reached up quickly to check that his paint was not messed up. “Whatever yer thinkin’, knock it off. We know about it now, so we can deal with it. It’ll be fine, ya pessimist. I got yer firewalls up and have downloaded the direction on how to redo them or fortify ‘em if you need to. I prefer teachin’ generally but seems we don’t have much time for that right now.”

It is funny that they think we are not one and the same.

We are not the same. You are a parasite *in my body.* The profile did not answer him, going dormant for the time being as Sunstreaker ran

through the program Jazz gave him. He ex-vented softly, “Seems easy enough. Thank you, Jazz.”

“Well, slag, if I knew I’d get a thank you, I’d’ve brought Prowler along to witness it himself.” Jazz teased, visor flaring brightly with joy. He gestured Blue and Sides to come closer, the two of them immediately huddling in around Sunny. “You three take it easy, ‘kay? Hatchet and I’ll talk to Prowl and the others. Go rest. He’ll call ya if he needs ya.”

“Stay with your brother.” Ratchet told Sideswipe before turning to leave, ignoring the scowl from Sunstreaker. He left before Sunny could complain, likely to avoid just that.

. . .

Prowl found them later, giving them a datapad and telling them to spend the next *three decaorns* to work on planning their bonding ceremony. “Enjoy your leave. Plan your bonding. I doubt you’ll have much time for it in the next few vorns otherwise.” Which is how they found themselves in their shared quarters, Sunny sitting quietly as Blue and Sides chattered mindlessly. His optics lingered on where the datapad sat abandoned on the small table they ate at in their quarters occasionally, spark fluttering oddly in his chest at the sight of it.

Will I even make it to our bonding ceremony?

“I… if I lose it again-" Sunstreaker said suddenly, waving off the other two from interrupting him as they both looked prepared to speak. “Just- let me say this. *Please.*” A split second of silence, waiting for protest. When none came, he continued. “If I lose it again, sedate me, and have them lock me off somewhere. *Please*.”

“Like a caged animal?” Sideswipe practically spat in disgust, field bristling at the memories that caused to surface.

Sunstreaker anticipated as much. He could feel the sadness and fear underneath it all, though. There was no real malice to it, at least not towards him. Perhaps at Shockwave, and all their other handlers in the Rings, but never at Sunny. “Until they can wipe my processor, yes.”

You can’t get rid of me. I *am* you.

A hand settled over his own, pulling his attention to Blue before he can think of a retort. Sweet, gentle Bluestreak. “But… you can't- you'd be completely reset.”

“Without this slagging profile.” He looked away, spark thudding anxiously in his chest. “I won't know who I am, but my spark will. My spark will always know. You… you guys will just have to be patient with me.”

Sideswipe's own spark throbbed at the thought of that, but he understood. “Like ‘Jack.” Just like their poor adoptive creators, they would find themselves learning to love once more. It was a depressingly sad life, but it would be a life. They would adapt and overcome. It was the very nature of their species, after all. They had adapted from worse. Nothing could really stop the Twin Terrors.

“If I can get you settled?” Bluestreak asks after a moment’s hesitation. “Bring you back?”

A bittersweet smile found its way onto Sunstreaker’s face, a hand coming up to caress Blue’s cheek lovingly. “Blue, I tried to kill Sides a few decacycles ago. And Bee! Do you think you are safe? Legitimately. If- If I hurt either of you, any more than I already have, I wouldn't be able to live with myself.” They all knew the meaning of that statement, felt the weight of it pressing in all around them.

“And if you die, Sides does, too.” A fact they were all too aware of, that had haunted the twins for as long as they could remember. Never one without the other.

A tiny nod from both twins. “It's the only safe way.” Sunny stated.

The praxian’s optics began to tear up, and he wiped at them angrily as the twins both moved to hold him between them on their berth. “This isn’t *fair*.” He whined, doorwings drooping low behind him. “I don’t want to lose you. Either of you!”

“That’s why this is our best option,” Sideswipe stated, hand cupping one side of Blue’s helm. “We- we can still be together then if the worst happens. It won’t be the exact same, but we’ll still be together. That has to be enough.” He smiled at the other as their optics met, but Sunstreaker saw no joy or happiness in either of their optics. Just resignation.

A pang in Sunny’s spark at the sight had him looking away quickly, pulling his field in tight. **They are sad because of you.** “We’ll be fine. I’m- I’m positive. We can prepare for that possibility. It won’t be that bad.” He sounded like he was trying to reassure himself of that, not them. He stood up quickly and crossed their quarters, heading to the small table and picking up the datapad. “C’mon. We have a bonding

ceremony to plan.”

. . .

Two orns. They got two orns before they all found themselves sitting across from Prowl.

“You’re needed for this next battle.” Prowl’s tone dangerously empty; he had likely shut off his emotional processing center again. “We need every capable mech we can get. I’d not pull you three in right now if it didn’t affect our odds significantly. You know that.”

“What? I thought we were on leave for recovery for another decaorn.” Sideswipe looked to his twin quickly, noticing the stern expression on his face that clashed with the heightened anxiety he felt over their bond.

“The Decepticons are planning an assault on the Well. Megatron wants to take the Allspark.” Bluestreak gripped each of their hands tightly, field flaring wide with worry briefly before he could reign it in. Prowl tilted his wings apologetically at his brother. “I have no other choice.”

Chapter End Notes

As always, feel free to come and chat with me (or remind me to update) on discord: HERE

Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They were heading into battle. A battle that could very easily decide the fate of their entire race. His battle protocols had already come to life, blade extended at his side. He was still very much himself, though he did not know how much longer that would last as the carrier drove on. Sideswipe was only in a slightly better state, sat pressed to his side as if he were trying to comfort him or calm him down like when they were younger. It never worked then, so he did not know why Sides thought it would work now.

He shuttered his optics briefly, processor drifting off as it calculated possibilities. There was still a 15.3% chance that, should he allow himself to enter a berserker rage, the profile would take over and he would attack another Autobot. 11.8% chance he would kill them before someone could get him back in control. It was just a risk they ran letting him into battle because *they needed them*. Few were as good on the frontlines as the Twin Terrors, thanks to their early vorns being spent in the Rings. No two mechs could fight together as well as the Twins either; they were connected as deeply and permanently as two mechs could be. There was no move the other could make that his twin would not have immediately known and be able to respond to. They were perfectly synchronized and unstoppable.

Sideswipe always came out of their rages easier, though. It was like a switch with him. Never had Sunstreaker ever had the same level of ease when coming out of a rage. He had to fight his way out of the dark depths of his own processor, forcing down the beast his mind had created to help him survive as a sparkling doing combat training. It got harder to do each time, even with Bluestreak or Sidedwipe's help or any of Jazz’s firewalls. It was going to get too risky eventually to go into battle, although he knew he could never stop. They would have to kill him one day. If it were not for Sideswipe possibly dying as well, he was sure some of the Bots already would have. He had never made friends easily, and his obsessive-compulsive tendencies did him no favors. He had somehow managed to befriend Ironhide, Cliffjumper, and Hound, and was sure those three were partially why mechs who did not like him tended to just stay away. They were good friends to have.

Thankfully, his profile seemed to agree with him. They should be safe if he slipped, hopefully. So long as they did not try to fight him.

Sunstreaker's optics trailed over the other mechs in the carrier with them, taking each of them in. His gaze lingered on the smallest member of their team currently, frowning settling deeper. *Bumblebee.* He still could not get over the fact that Bumblebee was being sent out with them, at Alpha Trion's insistence apparently. The old mech had apparently gotten some weird feeling that Bee was important to this battle. If Bee died because a mech with one foot in the scrap heap had a "feeling", Sunstreaker was going to send the archivist to the Well himself.

"Stop glaring at me," Bee grumbled, wings drooping some behind him while his antennae sat flat against his helm.

Sunstreaker scoffed, ignoring the teasing prod across their bond from his twin. "You better not die, Li'l Bee, or I'll kill you myself."

"That makes zero sense."

"He means that he'd miss you and wants you to stay out of trouble." Sideswipe responded as the transport came to a stop, doors dropping and everyone moving out. "Optics up, Bee. Please don't get shot."

The yellow mech huffed, but the twins caught the barest hint of a smile before Bumblebee got up and hurried off the transport. "I'm not a sparkling anymore. I'll be fine!"

. . .

Bee was only just barely fine.

His job had been to get to the Allspark and secure it, something Jazz and Prowl had both begrudgingly agreed that he was the best for. Optimus had not been pleased to let him go on this alone, insisting that Mirage or Blurr go instead before Prowl finally talked sense into him. His carrier had then gone silent for a long time, up until just a joor before their transport was leaving. "Be careful, Bumblebee," was all he had said, but it had been enough.

Which is how Bumeblee found himself stuck behind an outcropping just shy of the entrance to the Well, trapped under heavy fire and watching as Megatron drew closer. He would need help to make it passed the Warlord. Bumblebee was honestly amazed that Sunstreaker responded to his comm a few kliks later given the state he had last

seen the twins in. He was relieved all the same at the gruff "what" he got as he dodged cannon fire and ducked as far behind his little bit of cover as he could. *[I need a distraction!]* He said quickly, rubble spraying up around him at a shot that was too close, whether it was meant for him or not.

[Is the battle not distraction enough?] The snark was refreshing to hear, since it meant Sunny was not completely gone yet. There was enough of him left to be able to help him. He would have asked the jet twins, or Bluestreak, but he needed something chaotic and while Fire and Storm could certainly supply that…

Well, no one quite did chaos as well as the Twin Terrors.

[Megatron is going for the Allspark! I need you guys to draw fire from me, so I can get to it before him!] And hopefully not die in the process. Optimus would *not* be happy if he got himself killed during his first actual battle. It would be devastating to the Prime, and proof that Bee was not ready, like he had said. He was going to prove him wrong. *[Draw his attention if you can!]*

He got a grunted affirmative and broke out into a sprint when he saw two red and yellow forms dash by him, firing after the warlord. He would owe Sunny and Sides big later, but now he had to ensure there would be a later. He counted to four, forcing down the wild hammering in his spark. At four, he bolted from his little patch of cover, optics fixed on the entrance to the Well. His small frame slid between legs and under large peds, escaping a few tight spots in the nick of time. He ignored the occasional burn of an energon cannon shot scraping his frame. Bumblebee had one job to do. He had to beat old buckethead down to the Allspark, and the twins had just given him an opening to do so. He transformed and rushed down the tunnel, hoping that they could handle Megatron *safely* long enough for him to do what he needed to do.

No one had wanted him to come to this battle except for Alpha Trion, and the old mech's insistence to Optimus was the only reason he had been allowed. Alpha Trion had said he was important to this battle, but that he did not know why. Bee knew, though. He had been to the Well once with Optimus and had been overwhelmed by this *pull* to the Allspark then. It led him along now, keeping his path true through the winding and branching tunnels. He was linked to the Allspark somehow. Perhaps it knew what he needed to do that orn.

He skidded to a halt, transforming in the cavern that held the cube. It

took up a large chunk of the cavern, one corner sticking through the surface of Cybertron above them. Shaking himself out of his awe, he moved forward to the nearest corner to him, reaching his hands up. “Please.” He whispered. “Let me keep you safe.” The second his fingers grazed it light raced along the cube. It took all of his willpower to not pull away, keeping his hands on it as it started to fold in on itself. It continued until it fit perfectly in his hands.

Holding it felt *right*.

Sadly, he could not hold onto it. He could hear the echo of engines racing down to him. He had to get rid of it, as much as he did not want to. He pulled the rocket launcher he had snagged from his subspace as he sent out a comm to Jetfire and Jetstorm. *[I need one of you to snatch what I’m about to shoot and throw it at the space bridge!]* He yelled, placing himself against the far wall on the other side of the Well so he could get an angle out of the hole.

[On our way. Fire when ready!] Storm and Fire answered in unison.

“Goodbye, Allspark. Forgive me.” Bee took a deep breath as Megatron entered the cavern, pulling the trigger and launching the Allspark into the sky. Fire came roaring into view and snagged the object before flying up into the sky with his twin on his tail. The flyer chucked the Allspark, and it flew at the space bridge.

[*Blow the space bridge!*] Bee screamed over the comm the second he saw the Allspark getting pulled through, [*Now!*]

Springer was the first to respond, as the Wreckers crew had the best angle on the space bridge. [*If we blow it, we lose the Allspark!*]

[*We lose it if we don’t. Blow the space bridge.*] came Prowl’s cool voice, firm in backing up Bee’s order. The young mech wanted to cry tears of joy as he saw it light up the sky shortly after, but the roar of rage from Megatron had him snapping his optics to where the other stood on the opposite side of the Well.

“You’ve doomed us, mechling! Murdered your own race!” The warlord growled out as he stalked closer, blocking of Bee’s main escape route in the process.

Bumblebee stood as tall as he could, though, glaring down the snarling leader of the Decepticons from the ledge over the Well he still stood on. “I didn’t start a war that *killed* our planet!” He had nowhere to go, not without fighting his way back by the large mech. And Bee

was not delusional enough to think he could defeat Megatron, not with what weaponry he had on him. If reinforcements could not make it to him soon, he was as good as dead.

At least he would die a hero.

Megatron was one him the next instant, ignoring the shots from Bee's blaster and grabbing his doorwings. Pain raced through his system as Megatron tore them both free, throwing them aside before swinging his mace at Bee and sending the shocked mech flying. "You will pay for this, *bug*."

"Bug?" Bee managed, forcing himself up. "That's just rude." His optics flickered around, spotting his blaster too far away for him to reach. One hand covered the wound in his side as he tried to creep back some as the warlord continued his approach. "It's not my fault I'm small." He had a split second of warning as the silver mech's mace shifted, his arm taking the form of a mighty cannon before he was being fired upon. He transformed, joints groaning as he forced it to complete even with his missing doorwings, and he gunned it for the exit. He dodged cannon fire, weaving around rocks and craters from the shots. He had to-

A shot hitting his rear bumper sent him flying, forcing him out of his alt mode as he crashed into one of the side walls of the tunnel. His vision flickered dangerously as he tried to scramble to a stand, but a clawed hand was snatching him up before he could try to continue his getaway. It slammed him back against the wall, sending further pain shooting along his back as his vision failed with warnings of all his damage.

He was going to die.

Bee clawed at the hand holding him up as it tightened, struggling as much as he could. He was losing too much energon from his side and back, though, for him to do much. "I'd say you will regret that, bug, but I won't let you live long enough for that."

"My designation is Bumblebee," He managed to spit out, right before Megatron's blade crashed through his chestplates and he *screamed*. The grip on him loosened, and Bee was barely aware of a startled look of recognition from Megatron. It was gone quickly, though, as Megatron's claws dug into his throat and *tore*. He could not scream again, but he wanted to, desperately. The hulking mech cast him aside as his vision began to dim and flicker.

I'm sorry, Optimus. Forgive me, Carrier, he thought, letting stasis pull him under.

. . .

They had to hurry. Something felt wrong to him, more so than the typical wrong he felt when going into a rage. He was pushing his frame as quick as it could go, Sunstreaker right on his heels. The rage was starting to slip, however, and he could only push himself so hard when in total control. He felt the damage to his frame, felt every torn cable or bit of burned plating.

Sunny was not having the same problem, thankfully. His twin pushed passed him, still very much lost to his profile. The second they came over the ridge, Sunstreaker launched himself without a second thought at a large, hulking silver form. That silhouette stopped Sides in his tracks, body shuddering from exhaustion as he just stared. He knew that form, had seen it in the shadows before. *The Rings*. It was the mech who watched them in the Rings. And his blade was dripping with bright blue energon. That was nearly enough to reignite the rage. The aft had injured Sunny, somehow. No one hurt his twin.

Except it was not Sunny's energon, because laying there on the ground just before him was a wrecked, bright yellow form. Just off to the side was a set of wings in that same bright yellow and a handful of wires and components.

"Li'l Bee." He breathed out, falling forward. Panic was pushing his anger aside easily, energon rising in his throat as the urge to purge his tanks became almost overwhelming. His hands began to move of their own accord, sealing lines where he could and trying to staunch as much of the energon oozing from the other as possible. [*Someone, help! I need a medic! Bumblebee has been hurt bad! Help!*] He begged over the comm lines, sending out a location ping. There was no time to stop and worry about Sunny tearing after the mech that did this, to address the pain he felt echo over their bond when the mech snapped Sunny's arm at his elbow before fleeing.

If he did not focus, Bee was dead. Even if he did, and someone got there soon, Bee may still be dead. Sideswipe did not know what he would do if that happened. Bee had to live. [*Blue, I need you to get Sunny settled so I can focus!*]

[On my way and bringing First Aid.] Came the quick response, and Sideswipe was turning all his attention to stemming the flow of

energon from Bumblebee's throat and chestplates. He had to stifle a cry of pain to accompany his twin's, feeling as Sunstreaker's arm was ripped free of its socket. Sunny would be fine, Sides knew; he was vaguely aware of his twin signaling the mech had retreated.

/Don't pursue! I need you here, Sunstreaker!/ Hopefully, even if Sunny still was not in control, the profile would listen to him.

He felt the other's field brush his own, kneeling beside him. "Where do you need my help?" His voice was rough, field not *quite* correct. It was the only sign that this was not Sunny speaking to him. He held himself the same, had the same inflection. But it was just slightly *off*.

Sideswipe could not afford to turn the assistance away. "Apply pressure to that wound on his side. If you can, try sealing it. But *be careful*. If you use your blade's highest heat, you could cause damage. If you can't be careful, just keep pressure on it." He caught a nod out of the corner of his optics before his twin's remaining hand was covering the gaping wound in Bee's side.

They had to keep little Bee alive just a bit longer. Surely, they could do that, right?

Right?

Chapter End Notes

... I'm sorry??

As always, feel free to come and chat with me (or remind me to update) on discord: HERE

Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

> We're getting to a point in the fic that just... yeah. Angst. Not a lot here, but it is on the horizon, my dudes. Enjoy any feel good bits while they last.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Stabilizing Bee enough to move was the only thing Sideswipe's processor could focus on. He snarled at First Aid when the medic shoved him out of the way, ready to launch at the mech if not for Blue tugging him off to the side. He stood off to the side and watched as Blue moved to Sunstreaker's side, grasping his helm gently between his hands and whispering to him like always. It was startling, the level of clarity in Sunstreaker's optics suddenly. Or it should have been, but Sideswipe's processor was still running hot and hyper focused on Bee's status. What should be a sweet, tender moment between the other parts of their triad was *soiled* by Megatron.

Everything that mech touched died, and Sideswipe could *not* let that happen to Bumblebee.

"Let me help. Tell me where you need me." He insisted to First Aid. The moment the small medic began rattling off orders, Sideswipe was moving. His processor put all of its power and focus into doing what First Aid requested of him *perfectly*. And he did just that; he'd spent enough time in the medbay to be a fairly good nurse, if he really wanted to be. He could do this. He could save Bee.

The second Ratchet arrived in his alt mode they were loading Bee carefully into his cargo hold. Without a second thought, the CMO sped away with First Aid hot on his heels. In their wake, Sideswipe's processor began to slow, finally noticing his twin and Bluestreak's fields pressing into his. He crumbled to the ground, three hands catching him as he *broke*. Had he done enough? Were they too late? Had he done *enough?* His own distraught sobbing echoed throughout the cavern, the sound of retreating mechs from both sides barely audible this deep into the Well. Sunny and Blue just held him, their own tears mingling with his on his chassis.

They stayed that way until Prowl came to find them, gently guiding them out of the cavern and back to base. He chided them softly for not

hurrying back to have their own wounds checked over but did not press about it too much aside from Sunstreaker missing an arm. “You could have bled out,” He scolded.

“There were more important things to worry about at the time,” came Sunny’s monotone reply. That had Sideswipe looking to him quickly, frowning some. He *seemed* like Sunstreaker, leaning heavily on Bluestreak and melding his field with both Blue’s and Side’s. But that tone of voice… it was much too similar to the profile’s for his liking. Was he just being paranoid? It was certainly possible that his processor was just running hot still. Blue had already handled Sunny’s profile. His twin was obviously just exhausted. They all were.

When they finally reached the medbay, Sideswipe found himself assisting First Aid again in reattaching his brother’s arm while replacing bits of the joint with new parts. Once that was finished, he was pulled into another operation. Then another. And another. First Aid kept him busy, directing him where he needed the most assistance until finally there was no one left that needed repairs. No one except Bumblebee, who had Ratchet, Wheeljack, Perceptor, and Jolt working on him. 12 joors of working with First Aid, and they were still working on Bee.

Sideswipe was going to be sick.

He was distantly aware of Blue and Sunny guiding him to the wash rack, of the two of them gently scrubbing away grime and energon from his body. A glance down at the energon swirling down the drain with the solvent had him falling to his knees and purging his tanks. Hands are stroking over him, trying to comfort him and it is just too much. He is shoving them off, scrambling away until his back smacks against the wall. There’s half-processed energon, solvent, and *energon* dripping down his front as he pulls his knees tightly to his chest plate and buries his helm between them.

The solvent shuts off as hands settle on him again, softer this time. “You did all you could, Sides.” Sunstreaker whispered, *actually* Sunstreaker. Fingers gently pulled his chin up, making him look his twin in the optics. There was *emotion* there, something Sideswipe had not seen from the profile. “Bee is going to be okay. Just like I am.” Sunny rolled the shoulder Sideswipe had helped reattach, exaggerating the motion. “See? Good as new. Because of you.”

“You bought Bee the time he needed for Ratchet to get to him,” Bluestreak stated as he knelt beside Sunstreaker, resting a hand on one

of Sideswipe's knees. "He would be dead if you hadn't acted as quickly as you did. *You* saved him, Sides."

It was not enough. The words could not leave him, got caught in his vocoder, but Sunstreaker felt the anguish over their bond. His twin moved to hold him to his chest, hands gripping him almost too tightly. It was not enough. It would never be enough. *They* would never be enough. Not for Shockwave, or their mysterious sire, or to keep their loved ones safe. Disappointment and destruction followed them everywhere they went. It was only a matter of time. They-

"*Enough*." Sunstreaker voice was clipped, pained. Sideswipe shoved the other off to look at him, scowling and finding his expression mirrored by the other. "Stop the fragging self-loathing. Enough. We can't save everyone or be good at everything. We- we're only two mechs, Sides." Sunstreaker flinched briefly from Bluestreak resting a calming hand on his shoulder but relaxed into as Sideswipe just stared. "That doesn't mean we aren't good enough or strong enough. It just… It just means that we're *normal*. Not broken, or worthless." His brother spits out the word broken, as if it hurt him physically. And why would it not? Why would Sunny have not been thinking the same things he had, for as long as him or even longer?

He may feel horrible then, as if he had failed. But Sunny was there. Blue was there. They were all in one piece. Bee would make it because he had the best crew working on him. Everything would be alright. It had to be.

. . .

Optimus had sat a silent vigil by Bee's medberth for two decaorns before the yellow mech came to for the first time. He could not speak, could barely sit up, but just looked at Optimus with a deeply hurt expression. Ratchet watched on curiously as Optimus just dipped his helm, facemask retracted for the first time in decaorns as the large mech moved to press his forehelm to his sparkling's. When the first tear fell, Ratchet turned away to give them privacy. Bee seemed coherent, and his vitals were steady. Ratchet could wait a bit before giving him a more thorough once over.

His stocks were running low. He would need to do a count, so that he could order more supplies. Not that there were many suppliers left on Cybertron. Ratchet ran an annoyed hand down his faceplate, moving to his store room to see the damage their most recent battle had done to them. They had not suffered any fatalities, thankfully, but the

injuries were still many. He had not treated many of them, a majority of them taken care of by First Aid, Jolt, and Sideswipe. There was so much to do. Ratchet startled when he turned and was face to face with his eldest mechling, nearly falling on his aft if not for Sunstreaker grabbing his arm to steady him. “Primus, Sunny, warn me next time!”

“Sorry.”

Ratchet flickered his optics quickly, looking the yellow mech over. Sunstreaker was never one to slouch, but the straightness of his stance and how squared off his shoulders were seemed wrong. Too stiff, and not just Sunstreaker’s normal proud posture. Almost as if he were uncomfortable. “Is everything alright?” He felt the flicker of the other’s field reaching out to him before being pulled in tightly once more.

“I don’t know,” came the soft reply and the tenseness oozed away as Sunstreaker’s chin dropped to his chestplate and his shoulders slumped forward. “I-I don’t know, Ratchet.” And like that, Ratchet found himself with his arms full of yellow frontliner, the mech sobbing into his shoulder as he held on to him. “I- I don’t want to- I-” Ratchet held Sunstreaker tightly, feeling the grief and guilt coming off of the other in waves. “We helped him go after Megatron.” Sunstreaker whispered brokenly. “I-if we hadn’t, Bee’d be fine. He’d not-“

“Bumblebee would have gone after him with or without your help.” Optimus said, startling them both apart to turn and stare as the Prime stood in the doorway. “With your help, he had a chance to survive doing that. And he has, Sunstreaker. Come with me.” Optimus motioned for the frontliner to follow him, “He’s awake. He cannot speak aloud, but I’m sure he’d still love to see you.”

[*You can take time with your sparkling for yourself, Optimus. You know he will surely be swarmed soon,*] Ratchet said to the other over comms, even as Optimus ushered Sunstreaker to sit by Bee’s berth where the smaller yellow mech’s antennae were perking up excitedly as he approached.

Optimus cast a small smile over his shoulder, [*And thanks to you, Ratchet, I will have plenty of time with my sparkling after this orn. It is fine. It will be good for Bee as well as Sunstreaker to see the other is alive and well.*] Optimus moved to grab a separate seat for himself as Sunstreaker clung gingerly to Bee, helm pressed into Bee’s chest as he leaned over the berth awkwardly and just clung to the younger mech.

[*They've always been good for each other, even in the very beginning.*]

Which was true, and part of the reason Optimus had allowed the twins to watch Bee when they were younglings. They gave Bumblebee more mechs to interact with around his own age, and Bee in turned help them embrace some of that mechlinghood innocence they had been forced to abandon in the Rings. He taught them to be gentle, and they taught him to be fearless. They also taught him and the Jet twins how to get into endless amount of trouble and pull off elaborate pranks, but most mechs could not stay mad at the giggling mechlings. Ratchet had to admit that Sunstreaker and Sideswipe's antics had often actually cheered up the mechs around them. An accidental morale booster, Prowl had teasingly referred to them as once.

Ratchet was still lingering on his own memories of the younglings as Sideswipe and Bluestreak came charging into the medbay. They both hovered around the berth for a moment before Optimus ushered them forward as well, instructing them to be careful as somehow all four young mechs wedged themselves onto the berth. He cast an amused look to Ratchet as he took the hand that Bee thrust out for him suddenly, sitting beside the cluster of mechlings.

"I'm limiting this here, before Fire and Storm show up and it gets even worse." Ratchet said firmly, levelling his own mechlings with a well-practiced no-nonsense look. "If Bumblebee's vitals get out of the range that I want them in, I will end this."

"I'll keep an optic on them, Ratchet. You have my word." Optimus promised, nodding to Ratchet. "Nothing will happen to Bumblebee under my watch."

There was guilt there, and regret, that Ratchet did not want to dwell on. He did not want to leave them, especially not with how distraught Sunstreaker and Sideswipe were at the moment. But they were not actually mechlings anymore. He needed to give them space, as much as making himself go back to inventorying his stores hurt. If they need him, they will come to him; he knew that. It did not mean that Ratchet enjoyed seeing them so upset, but he knew they would be careful with Bumblebee. All of the Autobots mechlings were safe and accounted for, and no one was at risk of off lining any time soon.

. . .

There was a lull in battles after the Allspark. It was unsettling, the fact that the Decepticons went completely silent. Sideswipe grumbled

about it frequently when sitting in on Sunstreaker's physical therapy sessions for his shoulder, earning glares from Ratchet many times. "Stop complaining. It's not like either of you would be going into battle right now anyway. Sunstreaker is still recovering, and I doubt either of you will pass a psych eval."

"I'm in his processor, I know he won't." Sunstreaker grumbled, grimacing as Ratchet helped pull his arm across his chest plate. "Slow down, Hatchet, that hurts." Ratchet rapped him lightly on the helm at that, earning a scowl. "Would you rather I *not* tell you I'm in pain?" He asked sarcastically.

"This isn't supposed to be a walk in the park, you brat." Ratchet scolded, even as he moved slower while guiding Sunstreaker through the motion again. "And if you don't tell me you're in pain, or something is wrong, I'll give you a reason to be in pain."

Sideswipe smiled as he leaned back in his seat, ignoring as their banter continued. Ratchet was of course correct, that unless the circumstances were dire, they were both currently sidelined. In fact, Prowl had dropped off a datapad with bonding ceremony information they would need. He had said they should take advantage of the break in fighting to finally complete the planning. Which was a fair point, but Sideswipe had yet to even look at the datapad. He would gladly leave all of the planning to Blue and Sunny. Not that Bluestreak had seemed too eager to plan recently. He had been so wound up since the last battle, barely leaving Sideswipe and Sunstreaker's sides. He had been accompanying them to every one of Sunstreaker's PT sessions, but Prowl had pulled him aside before that one. He had not said what for, simply stating that he and Smokescreen wanted to see Bluestreak. Sideswipe would not be surprised if the two mechs had decided to try and intervene with their youngest sibling and spend some quality time with him. It would hopefully help settle the anxious mech some, being around his family.

"Alright, you two, get out." Ratchet said, pulling Sideswipe's attention back to him as the medic patted Sunstreaker's good shoulder. Sunstreaker huffed, visibly scowling but his field meshed with their creator's affectionately. "I better not see you two in here until your next appointment."

Sideswipe stood as Sunstreaker made his way to the door, throwing a grin to Ratchet. "What about for game night?" He ducked the wrench tossed his way, laughing brightly. Ratchet stood there, smirking right back. "Your aims getting bad in your old age, Ratchet."

“You’ll be lucky to live to half my age if you don’t get out of my medbay,” came Ratchet’s exasperated reply as Sideswipe hurried out after Sunstreaker.

They made their way back to their quarters, pleasantly surprised to find Bluestreak was back. He still seemed slightly agitated, not really settling but seeming open to planning their ceremony. So, Sideswipe went and settled on the small sofa they had while Sunstreaker propped himself up on the berth with the datapad. Sideswipe paid little attention as the other two bounced ideas off of each other, only watching as Bluestreak seemed to begin pacing a hole in the floor.

“This is a lot.” Sunstreaker eventually grumbled with his brow plates furrowed. “Why can’t we just go to Prime and be like, “hello, yes, please bless our union” instead of all the pomp and circumstance?”

“Because Prowl might cry.” Sideswipe snarked off to the side, earning a huff from his twin.

“Screw all these stupid traditions,” Bluestreak said, pacing around their shared quarters. He threw his arms up, catching a soft snort of amusement from Sunstreaker and shooting the yellow twin a glare. “I'm serious. I’m tired of waiting when- when-" He stopped talking, just looking at the twins with that anxious, hopeless look he wore too frequently as of late.

Sunstreaker knew what he feared, the very same thing that he feared himself. That one day he would not come back or be able to fight his profile for control. That he would be gone for good, or they both may be. That a battle could take any of them from the others at a moment’s notice. Their time was short, and it always had been. He just nodded, aware of his twin mirroring the action. “We know.”

“Then- then let’s just do it! Let’s bond.” Blue declared, and that little spark of hope in his optics had both twins nodding immediately. There was no point in waiting, if none of them personally cared for the pomp and circumstance of a traditional bonding ceremony. Their families would get over it.

Life was too short to wait.

Chapter End Notes

As always, feel free to come and chat with me (or remind me to update) on discord: HERE

Chapter 35

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Beep. Beep. Beep.

A soothing field brushed against his own, systems coming online one by one. A hand on his. “Easy, Sunstreaker. Easy.” *Ratchet.* So, he was in the medbay. What happened? The last thing he had remembered was just being wrapped in *Bluestreak*. Why was he in the medbay? What was going on? “I'm bringing you online slowly. Your spark almost gave out. Sideswipe's, too. I don't want to risk stressing it too much too quickly.”

Oh no. “B-blue?” He managed to ask the second his vocoder was online. All he remembered was the delicious feel of the other just *there*, but a probe at his bonds showed he was not there. Not now. His spark still reached out, having felt the bond there even briefly. It ached to not feel it there. It was *supposed* to be there.

His optics finally focused, showing him Ratchet looking sadly down at him as he took in his vitals. The medic’s field brushed against his gently, offering some comfort. “He's with Prowl and Smokescreen right now, although I’m sure he’ll be back once he actually recharges. He’d not left the medbay since rushing you both here. He’s more startled than anything. We all are.”

“The bond. It failed.” The hole in his spark made that painfully obvious. They had been *so close*, had felt Bluestreak there where he belonged. And now he was gone.

“Nearly took both of you with it. Sideswipe's spark appears to be the worst off out of the two of you. I think his spark is what rejected it.”

“… *why?*”

He is only ours.

Did you do this?

Sideswipe is only ours.

A long sigh, Ratchet rubbing between his optics. “How many

experiments did Shockwave do? That you remember."

"3452." He said it as quickly and as emotionally detached as he could. 3452 times they had been subjected to the worst horrors they could have imagined as sparklings. 3452 times they had assumed they would die. Had hoped they would, even. Anything to free them from Shockwave's clutches. "Is that… did *he* somehow cause this to happen?" *Please let it be his fault, and not my profile's. Not my own.*

Need someone else to blame? It is not my fault, although I wish it was.

"*Stop.*" Sunstreaker hissed aloud, bringing his servos up to clasp his helm. Ratchet's hands were pulling his away, optics looking him over worriedly. He did not need to tell Ratchet who he had been answering. The stiff set of Ratchet's shoulders said he knew already. "I- It- it is just talking." He reassured the medic quickly. "It- it's just *talking*. I swear." He felt the scans, could tell by the slightly distant look that Ratchet was already calling for someone else – Jazz, if he had to hazard a guess. "I'm *fine*."

"You just came out of a medically induced stasis after you failed sparkbonding and your difficult to control profile is saying things that are obviously distressing you. I will be the judge on whether or not you are fine." Ratchet replied sharply, but his field pressed soothingly at Sunstreaker's. "Jazz is on his way to check the status of the firewalls you previously installed. Layback and ignore it while I go check on Sideswipe, okay? I'll still be in the room, so if you need me, just call."

"I said I'm fine," Sunstreaker grumbled as Ratchet turned away, making his way to where Sideswipe lay still on spark support. He let his optics linger on his twin's pale frame, spark clenching at the stillness of the other. Even in recharge, Sideswipe was never really *still*. It was so very wrong to see him like that, hooked up to all sort of monitors and energon drips. It was made worse by how numb his side of their bond felt, simply just *there* instead of the usual responsiveness he got when he prodded Sides.

He made to push himself into a seated position, finding his limbs slow to cooperate. "When will he come to?"

Ratchet answered as he worked, not taking his attention off of his patient. "I won't begin lowering the sedatives I have him on for another orn or two yet; he was *much* worse off than you were. He

needs more time to recover. Once his spark is completely stable without support machines, I'll feel much better about letting him online."

If you didn't try bonding, he'd fine.

Sunstreaker pointedly ignored that nagging voice, frowning some as moved to get more comfortable on the medberth while he watched Ratchet work on Sides. He did not get to just watch for long before Jazz was walking in, Bluestreak hot on his heels. The additional mech got Jazz a scowl from Ratchet, but the medic said nothing as Blue moved to hover around Sunstreaker. Their hands clasped together the second they were in reach of each other, Blue quickly pressing his chevron against the center of Sunstreaker's forehelm. His hands were shaking terribly, wings mimicking the motion behind him. "I-I thought I lost you both." Blue whispered. "I *had you*, for just a moment and then suddenly- Primus, Sunstreaker, I didn't know what to do. You were just- you were *gone*, and your frames were dulling and just-"

Sunny freed a hand from Bluestreak's grasp, bringing it to cup one of his cheeks as he leaned back some. "I'm not going anywhere. I promise. I'm right here." *You won't lose me*.

Disgusting.

Jazz gave them a moment before he was having Bluestreak move to the side, giving himself access to the medical port at the base of Sunstreaker's neck. He jacked in, and Sunstreaker ignored the unsettling feeling of someone foreign rummaging through his processor as best he could. He was aware of Jazz pressing and prodding at the firewalls they previously installed, tapping along it for any weak spots. After what felt like several joors of Jazz prodding and then helping fortify certain parts, the other finally left his processor and said the one thing Sunny did not want to hear.

"There's nothing else I can do."

His spark plummeted at those words, and he could *feel* the profile's smugness. Jazz looked at him apologetically as Ratchet began to stammer, making his way over from checking on Sideswipe. "Like I said, I can't wall it off any more than that. Not without makin' Sunshine here an emotionless drone in the process. I really wish I could do more. I'll give the info I have on it to 'Jack and Percy, though; if any mechs can find a work around, it's those two." He settled a hand on one of Sunstreaker's shoulders, giving him a gentle

shake. “They’ll figure this out. Don’t lose hope just yet, mech.”

“Wheeljack just might blow himself up first,” Sunstreaker said dryly, trying to shove his despair at the news aside and pressing into Bluestreak’s side. “Thank you, Jazz.”

The other flashed him a quick grin, “Of course, Sunny. Rest up.” He turned his gaze to Bluestreak, “Stay out of Ratchet’s way and let Sunstreaker rest, okay?”

Bluestreak’s faceplate scrunched up in annoyance at that, doorwings flaring out in offense, “I’m not a youngling. I’ll behave, Jazz.”

With a lazy salute, Jazz was off, leaving Sunstreaker to be hovered around by both Ratchet and Bluestreak. He did not mind one bit.

. . .

Three orns later, and Sideswipe was finally onlined. He was eerily quiet and still scarily still, but Sunstreaker was now aware of the immense anguish his twin felt through their bond. He said not a word when Sunstreaker and Bluestreak were allowed to see him at last, clinging to the both of them desperately as his frame shook with silent sobs. When he did eventually speak, he just kept repeating, “it’s my fault. It’s all my fault.” Nothing anyone said could seem to convince him otherwise.

Another orn under observation, and Ratchet let them go back to their quarters with Bluestreak with the stipulation that Sideswipe wear a portable spark monitor for the foreseeable future. That did not stop the medic from stopping by multiple times an orn, checking over all three of them almost obsessively. Sideswipe did not complain once, barely said a word. He barely ate, did not move from his spot on their berth. All he did was lay there, clinging tightly to at least one of them at all times.

“It wasn’t supposed to go like this,” He whispered softly about a decaorn into their isolation period – not that they had to be isolated, but the three of them were just not ready to face their comrades. “It was *perfect* at first. It worked, like it was supposed to. We were together, and it was great and then-“ He choked on the last word, stopping himself as he moved to curl up on his side, holding his knees with his legs pressed tightly to his chest. “It had *worked*. He was there.”

Sunstreaker rested a hand gently on his brother’s side, thumb rubbing

gently at his frame. “And now he’s not. And it doesn’t feel right. I know.” The broken bond had been bothering him as well, his spark constantly reaching out for something that was meant to be there. “It sucks. But Blue is still here. He’ll be right back with our rations, yeah? And then we can all eat together, and maybe watch a holovid or something. We are all still here, Sides. Even if we aren’t bonded, we’re all still here. Not being bonded didn’t stop us before, right?” He waited for his twin to nod before continuing, “Why let that stop us now, yeah?”

It was that thought that kept the two of them going in the coming orns. Much of their time was spent getting checked over by Ratchet and Smokescreen. If they weren’t being checked over, they were generally just in their quarters with Bluestreak. Sideswipe was talking more and beginning to actually move about their quarters more. Another decaorn of confinement to their quarters had him chomping at the bit to actually go to the rec room. It was at that point that Ratchet finally took him off of the mobile spark monitor, giving them the all-clear to be social and do *light* sparring. Neither twin was inclined to keep any sparring light, but Bluestreak was always there to be their voice of reason.

He was unable to join them when they were called to Prowl’s office one orn, having his own appointment with Smokescreen and a new mech looking to take over for the tactician as base psychologist named Rung. They had not thought it was of any concern, waving him off when he offered to reschedule. “We’ll be fine!” Sideswipe had said, grinning back at the Praxian as they moved to head to Prowl’s office.

They should have just all gone together.

“You two are being kept on a temporary leave.” Prowl said slowly, optics locked on the two and wings held stiffly at his back. He seemed as upset as they felt at the sudden declaration, Sideswipe practically flinging his chair back as he stood up suddenly in outrage.

“What do you mean “temporary leave”? What sort of slag is this?!” He shouted, temper flaring over their bond. “We both *just* got cleared from medical!”

“Per request of Smokescreen, you two are to take a temporary leave. He is concerned about your mental well-being after that last battle and… recent events.” Prowl said matter-of-factly, wings dropping a bit as he leaned forward. “We all are.”

They were not stable before. They were reckless and ruthless *without* everything that had gone on recently, and as such, Prowl was forced to bench them. He had seen it coming but had hoped he would be wrong. Not when he had just been cleared for battle again after his run in with Megatron and… well, everything else. Perhaps he should have. Not just their recklessness got them thrown in here, but what Sunstreaker had dubbed the Blue fiasco as well. No one dared mention it around the twins – or Bluestreak, for that matter – but it did not stop anyone from giving them a sad look in passing. Ignoring it did not soothe the anguish in their sparks. Mechs thought they were going to get themselves killed. That they would rather die than be without their third.

(They were not entirely wrong but Blue was still there. They were all still alive.)

“Bluestreak is, too. Spend some time together. Settle yourselves.”

“What’s the point?” Sunny’s voice startled even him, but his frame did not move. He was forced back again, had not even felt the other come up. *What is happening?* He did not get an answer before he felt his consciousness get shoved even further back as his voice continued to speak, *“*We can’t be with him. What’s the point?”

“You don’t *have* to be bonded to be together. You’re still a part of his triad either way, Sunstreaker.” Prowl said sadly before dismissing them both. Sunstreaker got up, moving quickly to exit while Sideswipe followed him slowly. His optics stayed focused on the other, brow plates furrowed as they walked back to their quarters in silence.

“What are you doing?” Sideswipe asked once they were through the door, tone firm as he watched the mech before him turn to look at him. The other’s helm tilted to the side, optics shuttering briefly in confusion. “Stop. Give Sunny back.”

“What’re you talking about?” The imposter asked, taking a step towards him. “Do you need me to call Ratchet?”

“Sunny would *never* want to leave Bluestreak. Bonded or not, we are still together.”

Sunstreaker’s lip plates quirked down into a scowl. “I suppose I should not be surprised that you of all mechs can tell the difference.”

“Give him *back*.”

“I don’t want to. He’s *weak*. Never even noticed when I took control. Can’t even take back control on his own if he wanted. He *needs* me.” It looked to a hand as he held it aloft, flexing the fingers. The scowl morphed into a pleased smirk, turning his gaze lazily to Sideswipe. “No one even noticed. *You* didn’t even notice at first. Prowl, with all his probabilities and simulation did not even notice that he wasn’t talking to Sunstreaker. You’re all so oblivious it hurts, but I’ll not complain.”

Sideswipe took a timid step forward, trying to prod at his twin across their bond. He got nothing more than a pulse of fear back from the other. He held his hands up in a show of not trying to attack the other. “Listen, you-“

The other moved too quickly, grabbing Sideswipe around his throat, and slamming him back against the wall with enough force to black out his optics briefly. Alarms blared in his processor and his battle protocols tried to come to life, vents picking up speed. Against his better judgement, he forced all of that down. He would not fight Sunstreaker, no matter who was in control that was still his *twin.* He would not fight Sunny.

“No one *but* you can tell the difference.” It snarled, hand tightening on Sideswipe’s throat. “And if you tell anyone? I’ll kill you and make him watch as you both die.”

“If he dies, you do too.” Sideswipe managed. He hung there limply, fighting every urge to *escape.* “H-how would killing us… get you anything?”

“I don’t want to die, but it is better than being forced back again. I’m tired of sitting back and only getting control when in battle. I’m tired of living with his choices.” The profile’s voice took on an almost longing tone at that; Sideswipe could almost feel sorry for it. He imagined the fear and distress he felt from Sunstreaker at watching his frame do things without his permission would have been just as strong for the now sentient profile once it had gotten a taste of freedom.

But that did not change that it was hurting Sunstreaker. He could not let it just force his other half back and run amuck through the base. He moved a hand to rest over where Sunny’s spark sat behind his chestplates, meshing his field with the imposter’s. “I’m sorry. I-I can’t imagine how that has felt. B-but this? This isn’t going to fix any of this. You can’t just steal someone else’s life. Don’t you want your own?”

The grip on his throat loosened minutely, the other's optics taking on a thoughtful look. "Of course, I'd want my own. But that isn't possible. I don't have a spark, not like you. I'm just a protocol that got out of control and morphed into… this. I didn't choose to be alive, but I won't go back to before. No matter what."

"Isn't death worse?"

"*Nothing* is worse than that," The imposter snarled, and his grip tightened enough once more to send warnings flaring across Sideswipe's vision. His hands came up to claw at the one holding him up, legs kicking out to try and get Sunstreaker's frame away from him. He moved a fist out to slam at the other's extended elbow, desperate to break the grip now as his delicate neck cabling was gradually being crushed.

"… Sunny?" Bluestreak's voice startled them both, not having heard him enter their quarters, and Sunstreaker collapsed to the ground limply. Sideswipe fell to his knees, one hand rubbing at his throat cabling as he reset his vocoder. He cast a terrified glance to Blue, voice coming out raspy when he could finally speak.

"That- that wasn't Sunny."

Chapter End Notes

> Uh, I'm sorry???? I feel like I'm sorry is what you say here, but allow me to remind everyone that there is a happy ending, I promise!! We've got about 4 more chapters in our story arc on Cybertron, and then we finish off this bad boy on Earth! Thank you all so much for your patience, and I'll see you all when I am next able to update!

Chapter 36

Chapter Notes

Hey, my dudes! Here is an update. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They were at a loss for what to do. Blue had to stamp down the urge to call for Ratchet, Prowl, *someone* to help. If what Sideswipe said was true, and he had no reason to lie about this, then their options were basically non-existent. Wipe the profile, you basically wipe Sunny, Jazz had said. As Sideswipe moved to cradle his twin, Blue tried to think over any possible solution that could work. Anything that would keep Sunstreaker safe.

He did not have the processing power of Smokescreen, let alone Prowl, so maybe they could come up with something. But any scenario he ran through his processor did not end well. “What do we do?” He whispered to Sideswipe. “What- what do we do? How could this happen? Oh Primus, I-I can’t lose you two. I can’t-“

“And you won’t.” Sideswipe interrupted his rambling, tone firm but not cruel. Grounding Bluestreak with one hand on his leg, he continued. “You’re not losing us, and we aren’t losing you. We just… we wait until Sunny comes back online, and we plan, okay? We talk this out with him, and then we go to Ratchet or Jazz or whoever he wants us to go to, and we’ll all be fine.”

Sunstreaker did not want to go to anyone.

When he finally came online, he scrambled away from them both, optics wild as he looked around. After Blue finally got him calmed down, that was the first thing he said. “I don’t want to go to anyone. They can’t help me. There’s nothing they can do, and we all know it!” He was starting to get frantic again, field uncontrolled and practically lashing out. “They’ll kill me. Maybe not literally, but I won’t be me.”

“Wheeljack and Ratchet would never let that happen.” Sideswipe insisted firmly, “*We* would never let that happen. You have to know that!”

That’s only four mechs against the rest of the Autobots. What can they do, really, if the Prime wants you executed?

“Optimus would never,” Sunstreaker whispered aloud, looking down at his hands. He clenched his fists tightly when he noticed his fingers quivering, trying to force his panic aside with his profile. “He- he wouldn’t.”

Bluestreak speaking startled him once more and had him looking up to him and his twin. “Optimus wouldn’t what, Sunshine?” Blue’s wings were held back at an angle, almost awkwardly; like he was trying to force them to seem steady. As if Bluestreak was forcing himself to seem outwardly calm. Sideswipe knelt at his side, doing nothing to hide his own worry.

On his throat, Sunstreaker could make out the shape of his own hand in dented cables and struts.

He was up before either of them could stop him, rushing out with a hurried, “Don’t follow me. I just need some time. Please.” He did not know where he was headed, but he could not stay there and watch the two of them worry over him after what he had done.

He never noticed the next switch, even *felt* like he was still in control. He watched as he found Bee in the sparring room after a lot of wandering around the base, working through some therapy exercises with First Aid on the mats. *Don’t.* He practically begged himself as he started to cross the room to them. He was startled by his frame stopping, helm tilting to the side.

Why?

It’s Bee. He responded, as it should have been explanation enough. He lingered for a moment with his helm still tilted to the side before he felt the profile relinquish control. Bee had noticed him by then, waving slightly. Sunstreaker did his best to reign his field in so the other would not pick up on his unsettledness as he went to greet him. “Hi Bee. Hi Aid. How’s it been?”

Bee chirped an affirmative, giving a simple thumbs up as he responded over comms. *[It’s not bad. Just really slow.]*

“Take it easy. It’s not a race, getting better. Took me a while after that fall, remember?” He advised, kneeling down with them on the mats. As if he was not a klik from panicking at what was happening to him, moving to help Bee through his exercises at First Aid’s instruction. It gave him something else to focus on, somewhere else to channel all of his energy for a moment.

No failed sparkbond. No rogue profile. No injured Sideswipe. Just him and Bumblebee, doing stretches and physical therapy exercises on the sparring mats. Once they had gone through them all and Sunstreaker was moving to leave, Bee threw his weight at the taller mech. He wrapped his arms around his waist, yanking Sunstreaker back down on the mats. Before he knew it, Sunny was laughing brightly, wrestling playfully with the yellow minibot. It went on for some time, until they both were exhausted and lay panting on the mats.

“I believe Ratchet told you to take it easy, Bumblebee.” Optimus’ voice startled them both, neither having noticed the large mech enter the room. First Aid quickly jumped to their defense, but Optimus held up a calming hand. “I am only teasing them. Although, I am sure Ratchet will be wanting to see Bee again soon. You two should move along. I would like to speak with Sunstreaker.”

Sunstreaker sat up on the mats as Bumblebee and First Aid headed back to the medbay, waving goodbye to both of them with a small smile. Once they were gone, he let the smile drop, looking up at Optimus as he reigned his field in tightly to not give away his anxiety. “What do you need, Optimus?” He asked, waiting for the inevitable. Prime was here to scold him, lecture him, tell him he was permanently benched because of his profile. Throw him out to the ‘Cons, maybe. He got trapped in his own processor, practically, cycling through worse case scenarios while Optimus stood there silently.

“It hurts, losing a sparkmate without really losing them.” Optimus whispered, startling Sunstreaker out of his own thoughts when he finally spoke. He knew of Optimus’ past, of course, but had never heard the mech speak of his time with Megatron. Pit, he had barely heard anyone else speak of it. What little he knew he had heard from Ratchet shortly after Optimus had been captured vorns ago, and from reading old recordings about the start of the war. The archivist and the gladiator, two unlikely companions in a caste society such as Cybertron’s, who would bring about the most devastating war since the Cybertronians had fended off the quintessons.

Megatron had rather publicly severed their bond, leaving the newly appointed Optimus Prime to still try and stand tall through the pain. The fact that Bumblebee’s barely formed spark had survived was even more surprising when Sunstreaker had watched the recordings of their appearance before the council. That Optimus had then continued to go into battle until what Sunstreaker knew was a premature emergence for little Bee had to have been against Ratchet’s demands. He

wondered if it had been a way to deal with the grief of losing his sparkmate. If he had given up that much at the time.

He stood up from the mats, not wanting to sit any longer at that thought; he could not imagine an Optimus that had given up hope. “Like… like I can’t go home. No matter what I do, it’s just out of reach.” He knew the feeling himself, now, and he wished it upon no one. “But it’s not the same for us. Bluestreak is here, with us. I’m not *fighting* him.”

The prime shook his head, “No, you are not. And I am glad you do not have to experience that pain, as well.” They continued to stand in silence after that, neither really looking at the other.

“I knew Shockwave, before the war really started.” Optimus admitted finally. “I even knew of his sparklings, although you were both no more than a few vorns old at the point. I never met you, as he let no one other than Soundwave and his cassettes near you at the time. I had always assumed he would be a good carrier, from how he talked about his sparklings. It hurt to eventually see you two, knowing that maybe I- maybe I could have intervened. I could have saved you both.

“Truthfully, I could have saved all of Cybertron, if I’d done things differently.” Optimus lamented. “If I had refused the title of Prime, perhaps this would have not happened.”

Sunstreaker snorted bitterly, unable to help himself. He took a step closer to the prime, looking him dead in the optics as he spoke. “All I ever remember from my sparklinghood was Shockwave treating us *horribly*. He had you fooled if you thought he actually loved us. We would have had issues even if you did save us sooner, Optimus. And so, what if you had refused the title of Prime? The matrix still chose you, right? You’d have just delayed the inevitable. There isn’t a point in mourning what could have been. Shockwave still would have experimented on us. Megatron still would have gotten jealous eventually. Maybe he would have been able to be talked down, but things were already getting violent by the time Orion Pax stepped foot in the Council’s chambers. The war was going to happen with or without you, Optimus.” He turned to leave, feeling the ache in his spark to see Blue and Sides again come back full force. He needed to get out of there. “I’m glad it happened with you, at least. Thank you, Optimus.”

At the softly spoken, “You’re welcome,” from Optimus, he rushed off to their quarters, pinging Blue and Sideswipe to meet him there.

They needed to plan.

. . .

Sideswipe and Bluestreak were already planning and had decided to keep Sunstreaker out of the plans. “Not that we wouldn’t love your input, Sunny. We just don’t know if you could keep *it* from finding out about them.” Sideswipe had said placating, offering Sunstreaker a sad look as he said that. And they had a point. If he knew, the profile would know, but it did not stop the hurt from welling up in his spark that Sideswipe and Bluestreak would be dealing with this without his input.

“Just focus on trying to relax and stay in control as much as you can, Sunshine,” Bluestreak said softly, holding one of Sunstreaker’s servos in his own. “We’ll take care of it, and when we can let you know something, we will. Definitely. Okay? Just trust us.”

He vented softly before nodding and giving Blue a small smile. “You know that I do.”

“I can confirm that.” Sideswipe joked some before dodging the swipe from Sunstreaker with a laugh. “I meant it in a good way!”

Sunstreaker basked in the laughter and easy mood of his triad while he could, soaking it up and just going with the flow of it all for once. He wanted to be optimistic about all of it; that they would get his profile separate easily, that they could bond properly one orn, that the war would end without any of their friends or family dying. But Sunstreaker had never really been the optimistic twin. So, he settled for just taking in the happiness while he could, making more pleasant memories with his triad. So at least if everything were to go south, they would have plenty of happy memories with him.

He did not know when he was shoved back again, nor for how long. Awareness came back in spurts, the profile doing its best to keep him down for as long as possible. He latched onto those happy times when he found himself trapped in the dark of his own processor, to try and keep what remained of his sanity. He caught brief glimpses of training exercises with Ironhide or sparring with Bumblebee. The occasional longing look from his twin and Blue, the only ones who knew what was really going on.

After what seemed to be several orns, he was finally allowed enough awareness to watch as his twin walked with him into Prowl’s office, both very somber. Prowl motioned for them to sit before asking what

they were there for. It was Sunstreaker's own voice that answered. And he could do nothing but watch it all unfold before him.

"We want our own quarters. At least temporarily," Sunstreaker said, Sideswipe sitting quietly at his side.

Prowl resisted the urge to raise an optic ridge at the odd role swap for the twins, simply nodding instead. He knew Red Alert was likely recording this entire exchange, as he recorded everything except for mech's quarters and officer's offices when confidential meetings were going on. This was not confidential, though. This was just a generic placement request meeting. Where Sideswipe was completely silent at his brother's side, and that was the most worrying thing Prowl had seen from the twins outside of battle in a long time. Prowl pulled the necessary datapad out, scrolling through quarter placements for a moment. "Have you discussed this with Bluestreak?"

Why should we?

Because he is our third! At least act ashamed!

He is *your* third. I never wanted him. At least give *me* some time away from him if you insist on keeping up that relationship.

Finally, Sideswipe spoke up. "We feel it will be easier for us all to recover if we have some more space."

Prowl's doorwings were the only indicator of his sadness for the twins, their posture hanging much more than usual at that admission. "If he does not wish to stay elsewhere?"

"We can't be together the way he deserves, and it just *hurts* right now," Sideswipe whispered, his field uncontrolled and filled with sadness and loss. As if Bluestreak was not alive and well elsewhere on the base at that very moment. "We're not leaving him, not really. Just… we need some time to settle ourselves."

"You're his sparkmates. His triad." Prowl countered, an edge of sadness to his tone. "I know he'd rather have you in his life in any way he can than not."

"We're not leaving him completely or forever. We just…" Sideswipe trailed off, visibly starting to choke up.

"We need space." Sunstreaker stated. *No, please don't listen!* **Shut up.** "With everything else, it just… it is too much right now." *Sideswipe,*

why are you going along with this? Please stop this! You know it isn't me!

Keep telling yourself that. I *am* part of you.

Prowl ex-vented softly, doorwings inclining as he nodded. "I can have him temporarily room with Smokescreen. I do ask that you two do not exclude him from your lives entirely. Not as your senior officer, but as the mech who raised him. He cares for your both so much, and I know you two do as well." He gave them both a sad little smile, "Don't let him forget that."

"We won't." Sideswipe promised firmly, while Sunstreaker raged against the control of his profile. No, he did not want them to be separated at all. *No!*

Too bad you're too weak to come out and say something, the profile teased, making Sunstreaker thrash against the confines of his own processor even harder. He would not let his profile divide them. Not anymore. He would get control again, completely. And he would make it all right again.

Chapter End Notes

> I'll probably take a little break from working on Some Minds to put out more of Linger. But, it won't be too long, as most of the next chapter is already written and just needs to be edited! See you guys then!

Chapter 37

Chapter Notes

> I don't generally do content warnings at the beginnings of chapters, but there are some deep things mentioned here. So, content warning for implied suicidal thoughts, as well as implied major character death. You have all been warned.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Rung became the only mech to catch on to something being off with Sunstreaker. Not that he said as much aloud, but some of his questions and ideas for therapy when Sunstreaker was briefly in control made what he did know obvious. And the odd mech was a good one to have on his side, it seemed. Nothing made that more apparent than when he asked Sunstreaker, “are you able to fight without activating your battle protocols?”

He had not thought of that and could feel the profiles own anger and worry well up in him at the prospect. “Yes. Sideswipe and I both learned to fight before we were given battle protocols. I can.”

“I’d like you to give that a try, next time you are sparring with Sideswipe.” Rung suggested, and then immediately they were moving on to something else. It was such a simple suggestion, and it shifted the profile’s hold over him. Not much, but enough that Sunstreaker could stay in control for longer if need be. Enough that he had more than a few joors to curl up with Sideswipe and occasionally Bluestreak before he was sucked back under.

At the same time, it was harder whenever he did make it back to the driver’s seat. Especially when he was greeted by the sight of Sideswipe staggering to a stand, cupping an injured side or broken nasal plate. Because of *him*. *He* was a monster. The profile was still part of him, even though Sides and Blue insisted it was not. Those were still his hands beating his twin up. Even if he was not really in control, it was still him. It was still his fault.

It had been such a long time since Sunstreaker had just wandered into the medbay late at night while Ratchet was working, sat down, and simply talked. Ratchet had honestly been startled by it when Sunny’s voice broke through his work haze. “What are we even fighting for anymore?” The question should not have been surprising, not with the

Allspark being cast into space so recently. Not with Bumblebee still unable to speak and forcing his way through physical therapy, or Sunstreaker's own struggles with his profile and a failed bonding to add insult to injury. Morale was at an all-time low, and if any of them had been feeling it especially hard, it was Sunstreaker

He set his tools aside and swiveled in his seat to face his oldest creation, lips pressed into a thin line as he considered what to say. Freedom was not an answer that would work on Sunstreaker; nor was "because they are wrong, and we are right". If Ratchet were honest with himself, it felt like they were fighting because that was all any of them knew how to do anymore. It was all any of them could do. But while that may have been true and Sunny wanted the truth more than anything, there was more to it.

He pulled in a deep vent after gathering his thoughts. "I'm fighting for the two younglings I took in, that could barely stand to be away from each other for more than a klik because of what they went through. I'm fighting so that one orn, someone else won't have to experience the heartache of their sparkmate blowing up an entire compound, with him in it, because there is no other option to save the orn." Ratchet kept his tone level and his voice soft, even as he started to feel anxiety well up in his spark. "I'm fighting because every mech or femme deserves a shot at the same happiness and love that I felt every orn watching you and Sides grow into the brave, courageous young mechs you are today with Wheeljack at my side. And no one is going to find that if Megatron wins. You know that."

Sunstreaker seemed to mull his answer over, staring off for a second before whispering. "I think I'm losing it, Ratchet. And it is hurting Sideswipe and Blue, too."

Ratchet blinked at that. "I can't convince Prowl to lift your restrictions; Smokescreen and Rung are in charge of that."

"That's not what I-" Sunstreaker tensed suddenly, voice catching. His shoulders slumped forward after a moment, usually confident posture giving way to the Sunstreaker that Ratchet had known; the worried youngling that had always feared the depths of his own processor. Perhaps for a good reason. "Nevermind." And he was rushing out before Ratchet could get another word in.

Something was wrong. His first instinct was to follow Sunstreaker, to stop him and try to get him to talk. But he knew the other would not be receptive to that. So, he forced himself to remain in the medbay as

he instead messaged Red Alert to ask that he kept an optic on Sunstreaker. [He's not in a good place right now, and I'm worried.] He explained when the Security Director pressed him for a reason.

[Shouldn't you be calling Rung or Smokescreen, then?]

And he probably should have called one of them first, yes. But his first concern was making sure his youngling made it back to his quarters without doing something that would get him injured or worse. [Just watch him. I'm letting them know next.]

Rung was somehow twelve steps ahead of Ratchet when he contacted him, having located Sunstreaker already. [I've got him, Ratchet. Thank you for pinging me. I'll make sure he is looked after.]

[Thank you.] And he hoped that Rung could tell just how much he meant that. He could fix physical ailments all orn but was out of his depth when it came to what Sunny was struggling with. All he could offer him was comfort and someone to talk to, and he did not know if that was of much use at the time. Ratchet would not know the right thing to say to talk Sunstreaker back into a better place, but he would try if he had to. He just feared doing more harm than good. At least with Rung, Ratchet knew that Sunstreaker would be alright.

He put all of his attention back into his work, trying not to think of how *broken* Sunstreaker had been. Sunstreaker would be fine. He just needed time, and Ratchet would do everything to ensure that Sunstreaker had all the time in the world.

. . .

It felt like vorns before Rung reluctantly cleared them for patrols again. In reality, it was only a few orns after Sunny's encounter with Ratchet. The psychiatrist was hesitant to do so but saw very few safe options to continue advancing Sunstreaker's mental state and control over his profile. "You know ways to not trigger your profile to the surface. Unfortunately, outside of our appointments, there isn't much else to do to help you, and I worry that keeping you entirely out of combat, given your history, may worsen things. So, this is a sort of compromise," Rung stated during the session that he gave Sunstreaker the good news. "You can patrol for now, while still attending sessions. To get you more active, but also not send you directly to the frontlines just yet."

Rung would not let them patrol together, however. They were kept on the same schedule but assigned to different sectors. Rung had trouble

finally deciding on that, even bouncing the idea off of Smokescreen of having them patrol together with another mech to intervene if need be. He just did not want Sideswipe's presence to make the profile anymore territorial or active. But he also worried about separating Sunstreaker from Sideswipe and causing Sunstreaker's depressive state to worsen. It was a lot to work with but Rung felt he had come up with a plan that would ultimately benefit everyone involved.

Ironhide and Prowl required them to do a few orns' worth of training exercise before re-entering the field, of course. They went off without a hitch, although Sunstreaker did notice his internal temperatures were harder to maintain if he did not activate his battle protocols. Ratchet was livid that he would "try something so absolutely *stupid* as fight without your battle protocols", but after getting Rung to help explain their reasoning, the medic begrudgingly relented. He got First Aid to help Sunstreaker install a subroutine he could activate to help adjust his system's cooling priorities while fighting in his battle protocol's stead. It took some fine-tuning, but he eventually got it to a place where he was not sending Ratchet into a frenzy every time he sparred.

Getting back onto the patrol rotation did actually do a lot for Sunstreaker's mental state in control. He found it easier to shove the profile back over time, and he was able to keep it down for orns at a time. It still got the upper hand sometimes, but Bluestreak or Sideswipe could actually *help* again. Never did Sunstreaker think he would like the sound of someone calling him Sunshine as much as he did come back to himself to an uninjured Blue or Sideswipe. It was the best sound in the world.

His assigned partner for patrols was Cliffjumper, which was refreshing. The scout was one of the few mechs he got along with; Cliff got along with everyone, really, so that was not super surprising. He was not overly boisterous like many other mechs, or judgmental. But he could give as good as he got, be it teasing or sparring. He trusted Cliff to watch his back, and he got the same trust in return. Sunstreaker also trusted that Cliffjumper could take down his profile if need be. It was something he was less and less worried about by the orn, but he still wanted to be prepared for that eventuality.

Sideswipe was generally paired off with Brawn or Trailbreaker. He grumbled some at first about Sunstreaker getting Cliffjumper, but quickly stopped when he learned that Bluestreak got paired with Huffer. Their third often lamented having to listen to the mech complain their entire work shift together. "I'd give *anything* to have

literally anyone else. Pit, I'd willingly get paired with Prowl, or-or Red Alert! All Huffer does is complain! How does one small mech have *so much* to complain about? It just doesn't make sense!" Sunstreaker just found it amusing that their chatterbox third got paired with the one mech who could probably out talk him besides Blurr. Plus, he did enjoy getting to listen Bluestreak after shifts.

He had missed spending so much time with the Praxian. They were not yet quartered together again but had plans to go to Prowl soon about ending their temporary separation. Not that it really stopped Bluestreak for spending the occasional recharge cycle with them anyway, but they wanted it to be official again now that it appeared to be safe.

Sunstreaker and Sideswipe were generally given the same shift since they could communicate across greater distances without using comm channels. It made it easy for them to get sensitive information to each other if they suspected Decepticon activity in an area. As such, they also were on opposite quadrants every patrol as well. Not that they had encountered much worth using their bond to communicate over. Their patrols had been quiet, each team checking in with Prowl or Ultra Magnus at their designated checkpoints before moving on. At most, they dealt with scavengers or a rare turbo-fox. It was pretty boring if you asked Sideswipe. He wanted to see some action.

Sideswipe was making his way back towards the meet up point with Brawn following a fairly routine patrol when the comm channel crackled to life, blaster fire echoing in the background of the feed. [We've got contact in alpha quadrant! I repeat, contact with Decepticons in alpha quadrant. Requesting back up!] Cliffjumper called out.

Sideswipe was not listening to Cliff, though. He was focused on the sudden *panic/fear/shock* from Sunstreaker over their bond. Sunstreaker was overwhelmed, and he was struggling to keep it from bleeding over to Sideswipe.

[Back up en route!] Brawn called back, swearing as Sideswipe sped off ahead of him. Cliffjumper was patrolling with Sunstreaker, on the opposite side of the base. It was just the two of them in that area. And Sunstreaker was *scared*.

Prowl's voice crackled over the comm, calm as ever as he began giving orders and mobilizing reinforcements. All while Sideswipe felt like his entire universe was about to cave in. Sunstreaker's panic was ebbing

across their bond, even through the blocks they both kept up when going on patrol. His twin probably did not even notice, but that had him pushing himself even harder to make it across the patrol area. Sunny needed his help.

[These aren't normal Cons!] Sunstreaker's voice finally sounded, sending a spike of relief through Sideswipe's spark for the briefest of moments. [They were *eating* parts of the surrounding buildings!]

Sideswipe's own disbelief at that was echoed by others over the channel. *Eating*?

[Yes, *eating*.] Sunny snapped back at everyone, annoyed tone getting all the chatter to stop in an instant. [More help would be appreciated dealing with whatever the frag these are!]

[We are sending the Dinobots out now to assist.] Prowl said without skipping a beat. [Aerialbots, what is your ETA?]

Silverbolt's voice came over the comm channel not even a micro-second later. [Five kliks out, Prowl!]

[Fire and Storm, at the ready!] The younger twins chimed in. [Waiting for go, Prowl.]

Sideswipe was not waiting and did not know how anyone could. Even pushing his engine as fast as it could take him and leaving Brawn in his dust, he felt like he would not make it in time.

[They've got us completely surrounded!] Cliffjumper yelled over the comms, and Sideswipe pushed his engine even harder. He could feel Sunstreaker's panic and bursts of pain, could feel as his twin was slipping under his profile's control and tried his hardest to block it all out so he could just focus on *getting to him*. [Frag, they've swarmed Sunstreaker! I can't see him!]

No. Primus, please no. Sideswipe could not physically push himself any harder, was already feeling the affects of the stress he was putting his engine and frame under. His engine was starting to stutter, and he was sure he was going to be on the receiving end of a wrench later because of this. But what did they expect him to do? Sit idly by as his twin was swarmed by whatever pit monsters the Decepticons had unleashed upon them this time?

[Jetfire and Jetstorm are on their way! Try to keep an optic on his last known location.] Prowl ordered, voice calm and collected even

though Sideswipe's spark felt like it was going to either race out of his chest or just cut out completely at any moment. How much of that was his own, and how much had bled over from Sunstreaker?

Suddenly, the world seemed to shift around Sideswipe. His spark felt like it had been smothered with a blanket and all of the pain he had felt just moments ago was *gone*. He transformed to his bipedal mode, staggering to a stop, and dropping to his knees. *Why had the pain stopped*? The fighting was not over; he could still hear it off in the distance. But the pain was gone. It was gone.

/…*Sunny?*/ He reached out tentatively. /*Sunstreaker?*/

Nothing.

Nothing.

"S-Sunny. I-" Sides choked around a sob at the realization, whole frame shuddering. "I can't feel him." A long, static-filled keen left him as his frame tightened. "*Sunny!*"

Brawn was there bracing him, shouting commands over the comm as it felt like Sideswipe's spark was being ripped from his frame entirely now. The minibot was in his face, saying something before scowling and throwing him over his shoulder. The new angle showed him nothing other than the ground beneath him as the other ran, likely to base. But Sideswipe did not want to go to base. Sunstreaker was *away* from base now. They had almost been to alpha quadrant. They needed to help him.

"Sunny!" He screamed, trying to move from Brawn's hold but finding his limbs mostly uncooperative. "No, he needs me! *Sunstreaker*!"

He was hoisted away from Brawn after his last guttural scream for his twin. His vision flickered in and out dangerously, warnings flashing across his vision as his spark pulsed frantically in his chest. The last thing he saw was Ratchet's terrified expression as he forced his chestplates open. His mouth was moving, but Sideswipe could not make out what he was saying. The next moment, he was gone.

Chapter End Notes

> I'm sorry????????? In other news, should only be about 3 more chapters until Earth! Unless I break them up more. So there is that?

Chapter 38

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Where’s Sunny?” It was the first thing Sideswipe said when he finally onlined. Ratchet had looked away, faceplate scrunched up in pain. He had not needed to say anything. Sideswipe felt it in his spark, from the frayed end of a bond that he had always assumed he would never live without.

Sunstreaker was *gone*. He knew as much, could feel the emptiness in his spark. But he had hoped that maybe it was just a result of sedatives. That they had gotten to Sunstreaker in time, and he was fine. He was not supposed to ever have to live without Sunstreaker; Shockwave had ensured that. If one died, so did the other. But here he was, in the medbay with Ratchet saying something softly to him and Sunstreaker was *gone*. It was like the world was crushing in around him suddenly as grief welled up in his spark, those three words just playing on repeat in his processor. *Sunstreaker is gone. Sunstreaker is gone.*

Sunstreaker is gone.

Ratchet did not let him wallow in his grief for long before he administered a sedative. The emptiness seemed to grow tenfold, swallowing him whole as the sedatives pulled him back under into stasis. It was false relief; he came to later to the same crushing emptiness and could not stop himself from crying out. He rolled onto his side on the birth, pulled his knees tightly to his chestplate, and *screamed.* He was not supposed to be alone. Not ever. This was wrong, a horrible fabrication of his processor that he would surely come out of soon. Or a cruel, cruel joke. Sunstreaker would surely open their bond back up soon. He had to.

Sideswipe’s vocalizer gave out after several joors of his mourning cries, when Ratchet finally gave in and let him stay online long enough to let them out. When he could no longer voice his pain, he went to dig at his chestplates. He did not want to live a half-life, and that was all that remained for him without Sunstreaker. They were two halves of a whole, always had been. How could you have him without Sunstreaker?

Bluestreak's hand grabbed his wrists with startling firmness, snapping Sideswipe's attention to him. He had not even noticed the other's field meshed with his own, sharing in his sadness and trying to offer comfort. "Please," Blue keened softly, grip tightening as he was finally able to look Sideswipe in his optics. "Please, not you, too. I *can't* lose you both. Primus, *please don't leave me alone.*"

What was he supposed to say to that? How was he supposed to explain the fathomless void that was his spark without Sunstreaker? He opened his mouth to speak, to plead for the other to just *let him go,* but only static came out. He yanked to try and break free from his grasp, but Bluestreak held on.

"I-I *saw* them tear him apart," Blue's field was awash with sadness and regret. *With guilt.* "There were so many of them. I couldn't shoot them all, not without hitting Sunstreaker. I- *Primus,* I-" His voice broke off into a sad chirp, a noise often reserved for sad sparklings but he could not help himself. Bluestreak had struggled under the weight of guilt and sadness for things out of his control since long before Sideswipe met him; never had that kept him from speaking. Quite the opposite, actually.

As much as Sideswipe just wanted it all to end, he found himself taking a hand free to bring it up to Blue's cheek plate. He stroked under one optic with his thumb, chirping softly back at him as he could not speak. He shared his own sadness and guilt in his field. His longing to see Sunstreaker again, be it in this life or the Well. Blue could not make the shot. Sideswipe could not get there fast enough. They both had failed their third. Sideswipe moved to sit up, and Bluestreak took that as an invitation to climb into his lap and cling to him tightly as he sobbed. "Y-you were in stasis for eight orns a-and Ratchet didn't know if you'd make it and I-" Sideswipe shushed Bluestreak softly as he rocked them both gently.

It still hurt, being alone in his spark. He did not want to live. But he also could not bear the thought of Bluestreak any more broken. Not because of him. How Ratchet had managed to save his spark, he might never know, but he found himself to be an odd mix of anger and gratitude. He was angry because he was not meant to be without Sunstreaker. But he was grateful he could be here for Bluestreak still. Sunstreaker would not want him to be alone. He had hated that about their brief isolation due to his profile. Sunny would not begrudge them this, surely.

Ratchet came to check Sideswipe over once Bluestreak had settled

down some, likely having kept an optic on them from his office just off the medbay. Ratchet did not say a word but stopped to press their forehelms together after completing his scans, optics shuttering as their fields meshed. Ratchet's *loss* felt almost as all-encompassing as his own, with the briefest flickers of *relief* flittering through it. Sideswipe did not really have to guess at what the relief was for; *everyone* had been under the assumption that they would die together. His survival was an impossible feat, a medical miracle. Ratchet had defied the odds *and* Shockwave to save him. Of course, Ratchet was relieved.

Sideswipe was not. He was angry, sad, confused, and *nothing* all at once. As orns passed, until he was finally allowed out of the medbay, he felt emptier and emptier and *emptier*. Like he was a passenger in his own body, he watched himself go to check ups and appointments with Rung before going back to just sit in his quarter's with Bluestreak for the rest of the orn. The only disruption to his routine was occasionally coming across a mech in the hallways, who would often look at him sadly and then offer their condolences for his loss. He would simply nod his thanks and then continue on his way.

"You're depressed." Rung said simply one orn, getting right to the crux of it as he sat across from Sideswipe. He was watching him, waiting for the volatile reaction he would have given before.

Instead, he shrugged one shoulder. "I don't think anyone would blame me. I lost half my spark. Sunstreaker is *gone*."

His spark seemed to come to a stop suddenly, and he sat up ramrod straight. He had not said it aloud, not yet. He had not even said Sunstreaker's name since he asked for him when he came online. The admission had his spark feeling out of sorts while his armor almost felt like it was crawling along his frame. It was not, he could see that it was not, but it was like there were turbo-mice in his wires. Sudden panic blossomed in his chassis, shoving away the emptiness and slotting itself firmly in its place. Sideswipe watched as Rung frowned, saying something, but he could not hear him. He just shook his head, trying to convey that fact, to let Rung know he was *not* okay. Something was wrong. His ventilations began to stutter, rushing in and out too quickly to cool him as he quivered all over. His quivering hands moved to tug at his armor, to try and get it off to get the feeling of *crawling* away.

Small but steady hands settled over his own as a field he was unfamiliar with wrapped him up tightly. It was soft and warm and felt

like *home*. It had him snapping out of his panic, optics widening as his ventilations slowed and he just looked at Rung. The quivering stopped completely after a few moments as Sideswipe just stared at the generally unassuming orange mech. Rung was just smiling calmly at Sideswipe, telling him something that his processor still was not catching up to. He had never felt the psychologist's EM field, as Rung kept it pulled in tightly all the time. Sideswipe wondered why, especially after feeling it himself. It was so calm. So peaceful. Why would he not use that to his advantage more often?

"Feels like cheating, honestly." Rung said, startling Sideswipe briefly. He had not said that out loud. Sideswipe knew he had not but Rung continued on anyway. He talked about phases of grief, of highs and lows, and of a few potential sedatives he could recommend Ratchet giving him to help regulate sleep or calm him during another panic attack, if need be.

And then they talked about Sunstreaker.

Things slowly started to get easier after his talk with Rung. Not extremely so, as there was still a big gaping hole in Sideswipe's spark, and he has many, many more sessions planned, but it was easier to get up and be around other mechs again. He was reminded that he was not the only one in mourning; many of these mechs had been friends with Sunstreaker. Many of these mechs had known them since they were barely younglings, running around whatever base they were at and causing endless trouble. As intimidating as Sunstreaker may have tried to appear, as much as he tried to push mechs away, his loss was still felt by many. The worst of their friends seemed to be Cliffjumper. Cliffjumper said nothing when they finally crossed paths, could barely look at Sideswipe. The mech's faceplates had scrunched up in distress, field flaring wildly before the red minibot had reigned it in.

And of course, Cliffjumper was struggling. Sideswipe should have thought of that before running into him. Cliff had *been with* Sunny at the time. The minibot had fought through the hoard of insecticons, as the creatures were apparently called, only to find remnants of Sunstreaker's armor. He had been forced to share the news with the others. He had to declare his friend dead.

Cliff had made to turn away from Sideswipe, but Sideswipe would not let him. He rushed forward to catch Cliff by an arm, pulling him unceremoniously back into a hug. Cliff stiffened in surprise at the action, seemingly unsure of what to do. He was even more shocked when Sideswipe spoke softly to him, "Thank you for being there. For

trying." That was all it took for Cliff to return the hug just as tightly as Sideswipe. The two mechs stood there, holding one another, for a long, long time. Neither said anything after that, simply sharing in their grief and regret silently. But at least, in that moment, they were not alone.

With Rung's recommendation to leave their quarters more in mind, Sideswipe began to lurk around Ratchet or Wheeljack when not sitting quietly in the rec room. He had expected to hear Ratchet complain about him being in the way constantly while still working around him, but instead the medic seemed to hover around him. Never even started to complain like he might usually. He just watched Sideswipe, as if he were waiting for his spark to just give out. It was infuriatingly annoying how the medic treated him like the most delicate crystal suddenly. Ratchet had never been physically rough with any of his patients outside of the random (much deserved) scolding whack, but he *always* had some sort of sarcastic or dry remark to make. Always.

It was like someone had gone and snuffed his spark as well. He was a shell of the mech Sideswipe had known, going about his day without snapping at anyone or anything. He just worked silently for the most part, only really talking to give instructions to whoever he was repairing. It was troubling to watch.

So, Sideswipe just came out and said what was on his processor. "Sunny would hate to see you like this."

The medic dropped what he was doing, swearing quickly before picking up his tools and the component he was repairing. Sideswipe waited for the glare or the threat of a wrench, but they did not come. Instead, Ratchet kept his back to Sideswipe, shoulder struts slumped forward sadly as he set his work down on the bench top. There was a long moment of silence before he ex-vented and shook his helm. "I know. But I feel *horrible* for being happy that I at least still have you." Ratchet lamented, "And then I feel horrible for feeling horrible about that. And it isn't that I'm not absolutely devastated that he is dead. I'd rip out my own spark to bring him back. But no one tells you how you're supposed to feel when you lose a creation. You're not *supposed* to outlive your creations."

"He'd not be mad at you for saving me. He'd probably be happy that I at least survived." And he cannot keep the bitter edge out of his voice no matter how hard he tries to. He was not upset about being saved; he was upset that he was alone now. Not literally, but it felt like it. His spark was silent, empty, and he was allowed to be bitter about

that. “There was literally nothing you could have done. He was gone so quickly after he got swarmed, Ratchet. No one- no one there could have saved him.”

“That doesn’t make it better.”

It doesn’t, he wanted to agree. But instead, he moved towards Ratchet, waiting for his creator to face him before hugging him tightly. The familiar comforting warmth of Ratchet’s field enveloped his in an instant, and he just let go. There he was, meaning to comfort Ratchet, and he was the one bawling his optics out like a sparkling. When he could finally calm himself enough to pull away, Ratchet continued to hold him tight. “Just a little longer,” His voice sounded so small. Sideswipe did not fight him, settling into the hold easily.

Ratchet was not immediately better after their talk. Sideswipe had not expected him to be. But he did not treat him like he was made of glass anymore, and his biting remarks started up again. He found himself dragged back to Ratchet and Jack’s quarters after hovering for too long around Ratchet, where Wheeljack would gladly ramble away at him over energon or high grade. Wheeljack’s grief was so very different from Ratchet’s. There was no silence around Wheeljack, not that there really had been before. But this was different. He just filled the void with whatever came to his processor, prattling on about this or that. It reminded him of Bluestreak when he would start to panic or get anxious. There was no real meaning to any of it, other than to fill the empty air around him.

Wheeljack had also sealed off Sunstreaker’s old studio. It had been a recreation of the one from their original home, although on a much smaller scale due to the size of the officer’s quarters at their current base deep in Iacon. Sunstreaker had loved it as much as the original, though, spending whatever time he had for painting locked away in there. The few times Sideswipe had seen it, it was a complete *mess* and so very unlike his brother’s polished and perfect exterior. He had laughed aloud, unable to help himself, and promptly been banned from entering again.

(Not that it stopped him.)

Sideswipe found Wheeljack in there one orn after running into a frazzled Perceptor who had been unable to reach Wheeljack. Sideswipe had a hunch where he might have been and was unsurprised to have the door to Sunny’s studio slide open after he pinged it. It was exactly as it had been when Sunny last used it; paints,

brushes, and canvases scattered about in what Sunny had sworn was order. A half-finished canvas was propped up against the far wall, an obviously Praxian frame outlined with splashes of color behind it. “Jack?” His voice had the engineer looking over his shoulder from where he knelt in the middle of it all, giving a small, sad wave. “Perceptor said you weren’t answering his comms.”

“I just— I needed a moment.” Wheeljack said, fins flaring a deep blue as he spoke. He turned his optics back towards the painting, as he whispered, “Primus, I miss him.” And of course, he did; Sunstreaker had been closer to Jack than Ratchet when they were younglings, for some reason Sideswipe had never been able to fathom. Aside from Bluestreak, Jack was the only one who could really get away with calling the yellow mech pet names. *Sunshine* had been a favorite of his, one that Jack would always take credit for starting. “I feel so dumb, leaving this stuff here but it’s like- it’s like he is still here, almost. He hated leaving things unfinished, so he’ll be back to finish this soon, y’know?”

“I’m sure he’d hate us touching his stuff, too,” Sideswipe joked in an attempt to cheer the other up. “We should just leave it as it is.”

A teary laugh escaped Wheeljack as he nodded, fins still pulsing a soft blue as he spoke. “Oh, we’d never hear the end of it. You’re right. We should leave it be.”

. . .

“And how have *you* been processing everything?” Rung asked calmly. “You’ve told me about almost everyone else, but not yourself.”

Well, duh. He wanted to say that he was trying to *not* process, because focusing on his own pain *hurt.* Focusing on everyone else made the ache in his spark soften, if only briefly. He does not say that, though. Instead, Sideswipe replied with, “I haven’t mentioned Bluestreak.”

Rung leveled him with an unimpressed look, “Your conjunx sees me more than you, and he isn’t the one suffering from the trauma of a severed twin bond. I am well aware of how Bluestreak is doing.”

Sideswipe had flinched at the title, looking off to the side to avoid meeting optics with Rung. “We’re not actually conjunxed. We never had a ceremony, or any of that.”

“That hardly matters. You had attempted to bond, and I know you three had plans to stay together even after that. So, conjunx.” Rung

countered simply. “But that’s enough deflecting. We’re here to talk about you, Sideswipe. And while I do prefer letting my patients set their own pace, I feel it is necessary to step in. We’ve had a dozen sessions, and after that first one, you have gone out of your way to talk about everyone else’s grieving but your own.”

“Because my grieving *hurts*.” The words leave him with a sharp, bitter taste in his intake. “You *know* it hurts, you remember how I was in the beginning. How- how could you want me to go back to that?”

“I don’t.” Rung countered easily, tone firm and gentle somehow at the same time. “But that doesn’t mean I don’t want you to grieve at all. There are *healthy* ways to grieve and go through what you are going through, Sideswipe. This, shoving it all aside in favor of focusing on someone else? It’s fine short term. But you can’t run from it forever, Sideswipe. I’d rather you feel it now before it drowns you. There *are* healthy ways to grieve.” Their optics met and Sideswipe felt himself flinch away sharply at the intensity he saw there in the smaller mech’s optics, the *feeling* that remained unspoken. Sideswipe could not tell what it was, or even if there were words in the universe to explain it. Just that, briefly, he almost thought Rung *might* understand. That maybe Rung had lost someone too, someone just as important to him as Sunny was to Sideswipe. “Ignoring the pain you feel is not one of them.”

His session ended with that declaration and a reminder of his next appointment added on as he rushed from the room. He was not *ignoring* his grief, was he? He had only been trying to distract himself from it, to help everyone *else* who missed Sunstreaker. He had already spent so much time just *absorbed* by it. He was just starting to almost feel normal and he-

Sideswipe stumbled suddenly, a glimpse of yellow in his peripherals startling him. He whipped his head to the side but saw only his own reflection on a window to the exterior training grounds. Not a speck of yellow in either his reflection or outside. He was going insane.

Looking at his reflection now, *really* looking at it, had him frowning at just how scuffed and dingy his appearance was. He had been avoiding mirrors for some time. His twin had just passed away, after all. They looked different enough, but there were still the obvious bits of Sunny in his appearance, and him in Sunny’s. It hurt, to see himself so run down and immediately hear Sunstreaker in his processor, nagging him for looking disheveled and that somehow affecting his twin. A pained laugh bubbled up from him unbidden. He had never understood

Sunstreaker's reasoning for wanting them both to be pristine, but he had just gone along with it all the same. There was no point in arguing with Sunstreaker when he got in one of those moods. Sideswipe would give anything to hear Sunstreaker fuss at him again.

Anything.

Chapter End Notes

... I'm sorry. I hope that the next chapter doesn't take as long to get out, but I'm in the process of buying a house, so I make absolutely zero promises.

Chapter 39

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

… It's happening again.

He could not remember that voice, but he knew that sudden rush of pain. It raced throughout his entire body, making his back arch sharply. He could not online his optics, did not have the energy to, but he thought that may be for the best. *Again.* Yes, it was happening again. He did not know what it was, but he just wanted it to stop, to let him rest.

We will rest, soon. Once it's over, we can rest. It will be over soon.

How do you know?

It cannot hurt forever.

He really hoped that the voice was right.

.

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The pain was dull when he regained consciousness again, though he still struggled to get his bearings. His processor was slow to boot, HUD filling with various errors and warnings he did not have the mental capacity yet to understand. Not like he needed to understand them to know that he was in rough shape. His own throbbing frame could tell him that.

"You always were the better creation. It's a pity that the insecticons damaged you as they did; I had told them not to. At least they brought you in a revivable state," Sunstreaker's optics onlined while listening to Shockwave's dry voice mumbling those words. "Vector Sigma really is quite a marvel. We may have to repeat this revival process one more time, just to ensure we have an adequate amount of data." He ignored the growing rage in his spark at that, head lolling to the side to direct his glare at the mech, no matter how weak. That was what spawned him and Sides, who carried them to their extraction time and then tossed them aside to fight in the rings. This mech had gone

through the struggles of carrying, just to get a perfect soldier. According to Ravage, he had been overjoyed to have twins in the end.

It gave him more to work with.

Let's show him how perfect we are. His profile snarled, and Sunny sank back into the depths of his processor willingly. This was one thing he trusted his profile with: killing. And doing it ruthlessly, at that. The last bit of input he was aware of before completely submerging himself in their subconscious was the pain of energon lines ripping from his arms as the profile launched his frame from the medical berth. It would get them out of there, one way or another. He could just drift while he waited.

He did not know how much later it was before he finally felt the profile relinquish some of its control, letting him see what was going on around them. They were walking through one of the many desecrated parts of Cybertron. Given the awkward jolting, it seemed they were injured and limping, but Sunstreaker felt no pain pouring over surprisingly. Were they just that messed up that they could no longer feel it? Given that Shockwave had dine Primus knew what to them in however long he had Sunstreaker, that would not be entirely shocking. He much preferred that to the sharp pain he remembered coming in waves before their escape.

He watched their path for a few jours, not recognizing anything. So, he asked. *Where are we going?*

Back home.

To Sideswipe?

Of course.

Of course. And Sunstreaker settled back once more, turning his attention from their surroundings.

.

.

I'm slipping. I- something is wrong.

That had Sunstreaker snapping his attention to their surroundings, finally noticing the acid rain pelting their frame. He felt his spark lurch at the realization and found himself stumbling as he once again

had control of his frame. “W-what?” He caught himself awkwardly on his hands and knees, keeping from going face first into the rain and sludge on the ground. “Frag, we need to get to some sort of shelter! H-how long have you been walking in this?”

I do not… know. Long.

Well, that certainly was not want he wanted to hear. His vision was filled with warnings he could not make out, making it hard to spot shelter. Surely there was somewhere nearby he could hide. If he just got up and walked, he would find something soon. He would. He was sure of it. “Just hold on.” He whispered.

He was not sure if he was trying to soothe the profile or himself, but it did not help either of them.

. . .

Ironhide found him. His hands shook as he gently picked up the other, not listening as his patrol mates called it in. The other was barely alive, leaking energon all over. His chestplates were *missing*, cracked spark chamber exposed to the world. Limbs twisted the wrong way. His helm was split open, and acid rain had obviously gotten into the hole exposing his processor. Primus knows how long he had been it, as so much of his frame was eaten away by the stuff. Sunstreaker should have been *dead*, but still, his spark beat. Very weakly, but it beat all the same.

Ironhide was relieved to be able to tell Ratchet it still pulsed when they got Sunstreaker to base. He was relieved to watch as his friend worked through his own tears, barking orders to everyone in the medbay. He was relieved as he watched Bluestreak hold back a sobbing Sideswipe, neither of them leaving the medbay but instead sequestering themselves into a small corner so they were out of the way. Ironhide was *relieved*, but also impossibly worried. He was no medic, but even he knew Sunstreaker should have been dead; if not from the known injuries before he went missing, then definitely all the ones he currently had. His worry is what led him to placing a firm, comforting hand on one of Sideswipe’s shoulder struts.

“He’s a fighter,” He stated simply; it was the truth. Sunstreaker had always been so impossibly stubborn and determined. “If anyone can pull through, it’s him. Especially now that Ratchet’s got ‘im.”

The degree of damage to Sunstreaker’s processor had Perceptor and Ratchet both not wanting to bring him online once he was stabilized.

They had no way of knowing how he would react, if he would be the same mech or even remember any of them. As far as they could tell, his memory banks were fine, but his personality matrix was completely corrupted, and the cursory sweep of his code showed his battle protocols were also corrupted beyond repair. He would never be able to activate them again without throwing himself into stasis.

In the end, it did not matter that Ratchet did not want to bring Sunstreaker online. Somehow, he came to on his own, greeted by the sight of his twin and Bluestreak sitting next to his medberth. He did not say a word, one shaky hand reaching out to brush against Sideswipe's thigh. He had nearly leapt in the air but recovered quickly from his startle response and promptly collapsed on his twin. Sideswipe clung to Sunstreaker tightly and just sobbed while Bluestreak rushed off to fetch Ratchet.

"Oh Primus, I- I thought you were *gone*, Sunny." Sideswipe managed, relishing the feeling of Sunstreaker wrapping him in a loose hug. "I can't lose you. I can't."

Gentle hands moved to separate them, earning a snarl from Sideswipe until Ratchet's field wrapped around his own. "I need to check him over. You can sit there and watch, okay? But you have to move."

After a few long moments, Ratchet was able to complete an exam of Sunstreaker, assessing how he was responding to various stimuli as well as how his self-repair for some of his lesser injuries was going. They discovered a problem with him fairly quickly; he would not speak. When asked if he could not, he simply shrugged. His field was also oddly *empty*, not even the smallest flicker of emotion reflected in it. The only thing that made Ratchet think that his emotional circuits were still functioning at all was the timid way he reached towards Sideswipe and Bluestreak once Ratchet stepped away, as if he was not sure they'd come to him. As if it were even a question. Like he was scared of their rejection.

The two practically collapsed in on him, earning a scolding from Ratchet to be gentle before he moved to look over the scan results more in-depth. There was much they would need to plan for the future, operations and supplements and other treatments to consider. Many of his more obvious physical injuries had been patched to the point that self-repair could handle the rest, but aside from his processor issues, Ratchet was most concerned about the damage to his spark casing. Mechs generally did not survive those without lasting issues. He needed to figure out what accommodations Sunstreaker

might need because of his to eliminate as many negative side effects as possible.

For now, though, he would allow Sideswipe and Bluestreak to both ramble away at Sunstreaker and smother him in love. It seemed like that may be what he needed most.

. . .

“We’ll need to put you under to patch your personality matrix, okay?” Ratchet instructed in a tone so terribly soft as he held Sunstreaker’s hand lightly in his own. They had spent two decaorns coming up with the plan for the process. Too long, in Ratchet’s opinion, but he also did not want to risk anything going wrong. “This will require us to operate both on your processor’s hardware as well as your code, so you will be in stasis for quite some time. There is some risk with processor repairs like these, but First Aid, Perceptor, and me have all worked through dozens of simulations to ensure we will be successful. Are you alright with this?” Sunstreaker gave him a tiny nod and squeezed his hand. Ratchet’s spark throbbed sadly at the continued lack of any verbal response from Sunstreaker, but he did not let it show outwardly. “Any questions?” A small shake.

Ratchet wished Sunstreaker had questions, anything to delay this. They had practiced as much as they could for the procedure, but that did not mean it would go perfectly. Or that it would even have the intended effect. He knew that Sideswipe would have questions if he were allowed in the room pre-operation; he had done more than enough talking for the both of them since Sunstreaker came back. Their bond was apparently functioning just enough for the two to be able to communicate, which was the only way that Sunstreaker had been able to say much of anything to anyone. But there was no emotion from Sunstreaker’s side. Ratchet hoped this would help with that but had told them both to brace themselves for the possibility that this was their bond now.

“All I care about is having Sunny back. If this is how, that’s more than fine,” Sideswipe had declared quickly and with zero hesitation, earning a look of awe from his twin for the briefest moment. As if Sunstreaker had reason to expect any other answer. As if he would not have said the same thing. It made Ratchet’s spark ache to think on.

With one last squeeze of Sunstreaker’s hand, he placed the other into stasis and wheeled him into the operating room. They would get this right. They would. More mechs than just Sunstreaker were counting

on them to *get this right*.

And after more than a dozen jours of delicate work, they were done. The patch was installed, and what other minor repairs they could get done while working on Sunstreaker's processor were at least initially successful. It would take at least another several jours before they would be sure that Sunstreaker's processor accepted the repairs, but there were no immediate issues. So, Ratchet moved him back into the general area of the medbay and let Sideswipe and Bluestreak back in to wait. They waited until Ratchet shooed them out to their own quarters, hoping to catch Sunstreaker when he came to from stasis but had no such luck. So, in the early jours of the next orn, Ratchet found himself alone still in the medbay. He found himself still too wound up after the operation, so he worked away at rebuilding some smaller systems he had been putting off.

"I'm sorry, Ratchet."

The medic startled some at the whisper, whipping around quickly to look at where Sunny was seated on his medberth. The yellow twin's optics were focused on his lap, shoulders slumped forward some. Ratchet stayed stock still, feeling almost overcharged at the excitement to finally have Sunny say *something*. He was moving to the other's side in an instant, one hand on Sunny's shoulder closest to him. "Hey, why? You have *nothing* to apologize to me for, Sunny. *I* am sorry that I didn't try to help you more. I-"

Sunny shook his head, shrugging Ratchet's hand off his shoulder. That hurt some, but Ratchet would not voice this, just stepping back a tad. "No, I- I should have told you about all my issues, talked to you more, I- I don't fragging know. I.. I'm sorry that I let you down, Ratch. Everyone was right. I-I'm no good. Just like my… my *sire*." Sunny hissed out the last word through gritted denta, engine revving angrily.

"Don't talk about Jack that way." Ratchet grumbled, smacking him lightly on the head. "He is your sire, no matter what some CNA test might say."

Sunny offered a wry little smile, "Saying you would have been the carrier? I can't imagine it. 'Jack is the softer one."

"Please, have you tried keeping that mech on any form of berth rest? He's the worst patient. Pretty sure that is where Sides gets it from. That level of obstinance has to be inherited." And that little smile grew even broader and Ratchet could not stop himself from moving

forward, wrapping Sunstreaker in a tight embrace. “I missed you, Sunny. We all did.” He got no verbal reply, but the feeling of his youngling clinging to him once more was reply enough.

The first thing Sideswipe heard when he entered the medbay the orn following Sunstreaker’s talk with Ratchet was, “Your paint looks like slag.” He had tackled Sunstreaker without a second thought, clinging tightly to his twin and crying as the other fussed at him for messing his paint up as well. As if it had not already been in a state of disrepair before Sideswipe hugged him. Bluestreak helped the two redo their paint, coming away with a few small specks of red and yellow on his own and a pleased grin. Which ultimately resulted in him getting fussed at instead by the yellow twin. It was amusing for Ratchet to watch, and he was sad to interrupt them to give Sunstreaker a check every couple of jours to ensure everything was incorporating correctly.

It was all going well. Finally, if only briefly, everything was going well. He prayed it did not end.

Chapter End Notes

> Hey, I'm not dead! Sorry this took so long. Ngl, we're nearing the end, and I don't really want it to end.

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